

# Climate Change



A publication of the  
South African Council of Churches



# **Climate Change – A Challenge to the Churches in South Africa**

**South African Council of Churches**

**Climate Change Committee**



**Marshalltown**

**November 2009**

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# Table of contents

Preface by Eddie Makue	v
Background to the document	viii
Executive summary	xi
<b>1. Climate change on the agenda of Christians in South Africa</b>	<b>1</b>
The aims of the document	1
Climate change as a challenge to Christians	3
Climate change as a moral, cultural and spiritual challenge	5
Climate change as a new Kairos	7
<b>2. Christian responses to climate change (“Acting” and the need for ecclesial analysis)</b>	<b>8</b>
Recognising the role of attitudes and perceptions	8
Recognising inadequate theological trends	12
Recognising existing Christian responses	16
<b>3. Investigating what is at stake (“Seeing” and the need for social analysis)</b>	<b>19</b>
Seeing the analyses of scientific experts on climate change	19
Seeing the recommendations of policy makers	23
a) Mitigation	23
b) Adaptation	25
Seeing beneath the surface: The structural causes of climate change	26
a) The production of wealth	26
b) The distribution of wealth	28
c) The redefinition of wealth	31
Understanding the interplay between the production, distribution and redefinition of wealth	33
Discerning the significance of the production of wealth	36

<b>4. Identifying the roots of the problem (“Judging” and the need for theological discernment)</b>	<b>37</b>
Judging the inability to offer an alternative economic vision	37
A lack of moral vision amongst Christians in South Africa?	41
The gospel is being compromised in the context of consumerism	42
The Christian faith itself is being distorted: Prophetic critique, idolatry and heresy	44
In search of an alternative vision of hope	46
a) Justice	47
b) Peace	49
c) A sustainable society	53
d) How are these three visions related to one another?	56
A biblical analogy	57
In search of appropriate theological metaphors	59
<b>5. Responding to this vision (renewed acting)</b>	<b>62</b>
A moment of reflection on Christian action	62
New commandments for an age of climate change	64
<b>6. Doxology: The Earth belongs to God</b>	<b>73</b>
Addendum A: Endorsements	77
Addendum B: Resolution on climate change adopted by the 2007 triennial national conference of the South African Council of Churches	79
Addendum C: Declaration of the Fellowship of Christian Council in Southern Africa (FOCCISA) on ecological debt and climate change	80
Addendum D: WCC Statement on eco-justice and ecological debt	83
Addendum E: The term “consumer class”	89

## Preface

It is with gratitude, excitement and expectation that we make this book available. Throughout the decades of our existence, the South African Council of Churches, in a responsible and pro-active manner, strive to provide theological leadership regarding the immense challenges that contemporary societies face. The publication of this book bears testimony to our efforts to live faithfully to this calling.

A *Christian* response entails that we, as followers of Christ, act priestly, prophetically and also in a royal-servant manner. This document indeed offers a Christian – and therefore a priestly, prophetic and royal-servant – response to the immense challenges of climate change that we have to deal with.

In order to live in a Christian way in the world we need to live with *priestly love* and pay attention to what is going on around us. The famous North American theologian, H. Richard Niebuhr, argues that the first step in faithful Christian living is to pay attention to what is going on around us. Climate change requires our attention. We need to pay attention. As those who adhere to an ethos of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, we pay attention to the plight of our natural environment as well. So, priestly Christian living is to pay attention and to show compassion. This affectionate and caring attention is an expression of love.

According to Philippians 1 verses 8 and 9, the apostle Paul prays that this love may abound in us, so that we can distinguish what really matters in life, so that we can discern the real priorities of life. This priestly love enable Christians all over the world to pay appropriate attention to this world that God loves so much.

This document is an expression of love and concern for God's world, and it testifies to the priestly care and compassion of the ecumenical movement for God's world, specifically for the most vulnerable peoples, communities and ecosystems. This book will hopefully prevent Christians from repeating that classic saying that reflects the absence of the virtue of paying attention: *we did not know*. It recognises that Christianity (in South Africa and elsewhere in the world) is as much part of the problem as it may contribute to the solution. It therefore focuses on that which is specific to the Christian tradition.

Christian living also entails that we live with *prophetic faith*. The prophet proclaims the vision of an alternative society where the most vulnerable – and the earth, as one form of the most vulnerable – are not wronged. In December 2009, the next UN climate summit will be held in Copenhagen officially called the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP15). The Copenhagen summit is critical because governments must come to agreement soon on a new accord to take effect once the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires.

No matter what will happen in Copenhagen (whether it is a huge success or an immense failure), climate change will continue and its consequences will continue to affect the most vulnerable communities. There is a sense in which the SACC should look beyond Copenhagen and enhance the responses of the churches to the challenges posed by climate change.

This book attempts to strengthen the prophetic calling of churches to seek justice for the most vulnerable and for the earth. It offers to help us on the path of being perceptive visionaries, courageous and constructive critics, empathetic narrators of the plight of the poor and the environment, vigorous technical analysts and prophetic participants in justice-seeking policymaking.

Christian living lastly entails that we live with *royal hope*. We know Jesus as Lord. The crucified One is also the resurrected Saviour, the ascended One who is seated at the right hand of our heavenly Parent. Our Creator God still reigns. *He's got the whole world in his hands*. In loyalty to God we seek the well-being of the earth. We participate in this quest with hearts filled with hope. We celebrate the love of God for the world, and we participate in the work of the Spirit in individuals, the church and the whole world. This participation in the work of the Spirit fills our hearts with hope. And this hope is manifested and expressed in action! And to this hope in action this document inspires us.

This document indeed inspires and informs faithful Christian living amidst the pain and plight of our people and our planet. We thank the ecumenical task team who arduously worked on preparing this document, as well as the many who commented on and suggested amendments on the text.

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the South African Council of Churches recognises that climate change is not just a human tragedy but changes the very basis of survival on this planet. Mindful of

the impacts of climate change on food and water security, our way of life, our culture, our community, our overall health and well being, the ecological systems on which we depend, other creatures with whom we share Gods creation, the NEC therefore endorsed this document and invites others to join in such endorsements.

Eddie Makue

General Secretary, South African Council of Churches

18 September 2009



## Background to the document

This document emerged from a number of ecumenical consultations and conferences on Christianity and climate change in the Southern African context. It follows on a series of similar theological statements on social issues emerging over the last few decades from within the (South) African region – including the *Message to the People of South Africa* (1968), the *Belhar confession* (1982/1986), the *Kairos Document* (1985/1986), the *Road to Damascus* (1989), *The Land is Crying for Justice* (2002), the *Accra Declaration* (2005) and the *Oikos Journey* (2006).

This document seeks to complement similar ecumenical processes and documents on climate change from other regions of the world. It builds on documents emerging from within the World Council of Churches on climate change, including *Accelerated Climate Change: Sign of Peril, Test of Faith* (1993), *Solidarity with Victims of Climate Change* (2002), *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE)* (2005) and a series of climate change newsletters. Most recently, it draws from the WCC “Statement on eco-justice and ecological debt” (2/09/2009).

It also draws from statements in the context of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), including the call from the AACC to the UN Climate Change conference, held from 13 to 19 December 2007 in Bali, Indonesia, entitled *Responsible church leadership to reverse global warming and to ensure equitable development* and the *African Church leaders’ statement on climate change and water* (3-5 June 2008) and a report on an Ecumenical Consultation on Climate Change (Africa), held in Nairobi, 3-5 June 2008, as well as a declaration of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA) on ecological debt and climate change (27-29 July 2009) (see Addendum C).

Finally, it should also be understood against the background of a resolution adopted by the 2007 triennial national conference of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) on climate change (see Addendum B).

This document emerged through a process of reflection, discussion and education amongst Christians in South Africa concerned with the many challenges posed by climate change, especially within our context.

It is the product of ongoing consultations over a period of two years following a conference on climate change held at the University of the Western Cape in November 2007. This conference recognised the need for such a document and also drafted a skeleton for that. Since then portions of the document have been discussed in various workshops, church meetings, interest groups, Bible study groups and conference sessions. During the course of this process more than ten versions of the document were produced, distributed for comment and the feedback incorporated.

Since March 2009 a Climate Change Committee of the SACC in the Western Cape accepted responsibility for the drafting and editing of the document. In this way the SACC accepted ownership of the process of producing the document. From the beginning it was recognised that this process may be as important as the eventual outcome. The finalised version of the text was submitted to the National Executive Committee of the South African Council of Churches in September 2009. The document was subsequently endorsed by the SACC NEC, as indicated in the preface by Eddie Makue, the General Secretary of the SACC, above.

The document is aimed primarily at churches in South Africa and since the process of reflection, education and discernment is crucial in this regard, the SACC NECC subsequently invited other church structures and Christian leaders to endorse the document as well. During the months of October and November 2009 it will be forwarded to as many other church structures in South Africa as possible for endorsement – ranging from small Bible study groups to local church councils, dioceses and synods. In addition, individual Christian leaders, involved in ministries at various levels in South Africa, are invited to endorse the document. To endorse this document not only implies that it is regarded as an appropriate statement to churches in South Africa on the challenges related to climate change. It also indicates an acceptance of the responsibility to help disseminate the document within one's particular sphere of influence.

Recognising the significance of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 15) planned for Copenhagen in December 2009, it was agreed to set 1 December 2009 as a cut-off date for a first round of endorsements. This does not imply that the main purpose of the document is to influence discussions in Copenhagen. Instead, this is primarily a theological statement addressed

to the church in South Africa, discerning that a moment of truth has arrived where Christians in South Africa, together with people of other faiths and from other countries, have to examine their own lives, habits, perceptions, attitudes, ethos and spirituality.

An electronic version of the document including the endorsements received will be made available by 1 December 2009 when the document will be officially launched. Church structures and Christian leaders who wish to endorse the document after this cut-off date are invited to do so and to demonstrate a commitment to address the challenges posed by climate change in this way. The process of reflection, discussion and education will clearly have to continue in the decades that lie ahead. See the section on endorsements in Addendum A in this regard.

## Executive summary

1. There is an urgent need for churches in South Africa to engage in theological reflection on the challenges posed by climate change in order to discern the signs of the times. This follows upon a series of similar theological statements on social issues emerging over the last few decades from within the (South) African context (p. vi-vii).
2. This document is not primarily addressed to policy makers in government or in business and industry. It does not suggest from a safe distance what others should do. In an exercise of critical self-examination it speaks to lay and ordained Christian leaders in South Africa to assist them in reflecting on the challenges posed by climate change (p. 1-3).
3. In this document we speak about a common task to live together on a planet that we share with each other, with people from other faith traditions and numerous other forms of life. About this challenge Christians in the consumer class and amongst the poor (the likely victims of climate change) have to learn to speak together. This is by no means easy as indicated in the multiple voices present in this document and the attempt to use the pronoun “we” across the divisions of race, class, gender, culture and language.
4. Unlike Christian witness from within the South African context in the past, we have to recognise that we do not occupy and cannot speak from the moral high ground – because Christianity is considered by many to be part of the problem, not the solution, because others have been acting as prophets in this regard, because South Africa’s carbon emissions are so high, and because the ideology of consumerism affects all of us in different ways. Any form of Christian witness in the context of climate change will therefore be to use a measure by which we will be measured (p. 3-5).
5. Climate change poses not merely a technological, an economic or a political challenge. Given the pervasiveness of the consumer culture and of consumerist desires, it is also a cultural, moral and indeed a spiritual problem – which lies not merely in the ecosystem but also in the human heart, in our attitudes, orientations and aspirations, in our priorities, habits, practices and institutions (p. 5-7). This implies that climate change requires from Christians, especially those in the consumer class, nothing less than conversion, a fundamental change of mind (*metanoia*).
6. Although it may be true that climate change has not nearly been at the top of the social agenda of churches in South Africa, it is affecting people more deeply than they may realise since it touches on our perceptions of the future. The educated and the illiterate alike notice weather changes and

wonder why this is the case. Deep down we fear what the future will bring for us and our children. In this document we seek to articulate how people from different sectors of the South Africa society actually respond to the issue of climate change (p. 8-12).

7. Amongst Christians, the quest to find an appropriate response has been inhibited by a number of theological trends that have to be exposed as inadequate. In this document we explore in this regard mastery theology, escapist theologies, inculturation theologies in the context of consumerism, blaming theologies and the prosperity gospel (p. 12-16).

8. Worldwide many people (including Christian communities in South Africa) have been wonderfully innovative in finding practical solutions to lower our collective carbon footprint (p. 16-19). However, the response has not nearly been commensurate to the scale and gravity of the problem. It is possible, even if difficult for people in the consumer class to reduce their personal carbon footprint by 10%, but what is required is a global reduction of around 50% (up to 80% amongst the consumer class and in highly industrialised countries). More good intentions will not resolve the problem!

9. Christian communities in South Africa need to educate themselves on how greenhouse gases are being emitted – through the use of fossil fuels, through the products that we buy and consume and through what is done in the public sphere on our behalf (p. 21-23).

10. Churches in South Africa will have a special responsibility in coming decades to assist the victims of climate change (including environmental refugees from elsewhere in Africa) who are unable to adapt to the impact of climate change and who could not be assisted through global adaptation measures. Indeed, when the impact of climate change will become severe, there is a likelihood that “love will grow lukewarm” (p. 25).

11. In analysing the root causes of climate change it is important to integrate the needs for the production of wealth (as emphasised in neo-liberal capitalism), the more equitable distribution of wealth (as emphasised in forms of socialism) and the redefinition of wealth (as emphasised in the so-called “new economics”). The document offers an extensive analysis that can aid further reflection amongst Christians on the economy and concludes that the church is called to emphasise that aspect which is neglected in a particular context (p. 26-35).

12. Although climate change has been on the global agenda for more than two decades, carbon emissions are still increasing and may well continue to do so. This takes place despite the fact that the technology to address the problem is already available. This suggests that the underlying problem is not just a lack of information or planning. It is a liberal fallacy to assume

that information and education is sufficient to encourage moral action. We suggest that, at a deeper level, the problem may be one of *a lack of moral imagination, moral courage and moral leadership*. It is a matter of moral vision. We need to envision alternatives to the current global economic order that has caused climate change. Such a vision needs to be attractive enough to motivate millions of people, to energise and mobilise action. The question is therefore whether a different world is indeed possible (p. 37-38).

13. Religious traditions can play a crucial role to offer the necessary inspiration, spiritual vision, ecological wisdom, ethical discernment, moral power and *hope* to sustain an ecological transformation. Religious traditions can provide what science cannot: they promise not only meaning, but also survival power, deliverance, healing, well-being (p. 39-40). Given the complicity of Christianity in climate change, it should be clear that Christians will need to play a crucial role in coming to terms with the deepest roots of the crisis.

14. It is deeply worrying that we as Christians, too, so often seem unable to portray through our witness and action the kind of alternative that is required – despite our cherished heritage in this regard. In fact, many Christians have been supporting a destructive vision. We have placed our faith and trust in human ingenuity, scientific progress and technological innovation. We believe that knowledge and education (or suitable qualifications) will offer us and our children a ticket to prosperity. We have followed the secular dreams of increasing prosperity and economic development. We have come to follow a lifestyle (or to hope to be able to adopt a lifestyle) that is not sustainable and cannot be adopted by all others. We have been captured by the lure of consumerism and hedonism (p. 40-41).

15. It is perhaps still understandable that we as Christians have been trapped by the lure of wealth. However, it is especially disturbing that we all too often interpret and proclaim the gospel accordingly. This leads to a form of cultural Christianity that fits all too snugly with the consumer society in which we find ourselves. In this document we identify several ways in which the gospel has been compromised in our own midst (p. 41-43).

16. Climate change is more than an ethical issue. It is also a matter where the content and the significance of the Christian faith are at stake. In the context of consumerism Christians have to reflect anew on the dangers of idolatry and the surrogates that we tend to find for trust in God and in the Way of the cross. We explore such surrogates and the dangers of heresy (p. 43-5). The very purpose of this document is to confront and expose new ways in which the Christian faith is being distorted amongst ourselves.

17. Where can we find an inspiring vision of hope in the context of climate change, one that will energise people to take the appropriate steps? We explore three concepts that have captured an ecumenical vision since the

Nairobi assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975, namely *justice* (in the face of economic inequalities and injustices), *peace* (in the context of polarisation and conflict over scarce resources) and a *sustainable society* (amidst planetary threats to survival). We also explain why these aspects are sometimes in tension with each other because priorities are understood in different ways (p. 46-56).

18. In seeking a biblical analogy for our time, we focus on the reign of Josiah, king of Judah, when drastic reforms were seen as the only way that a looming catastrophe could be averted. This stimulated a return to the Torah, to an understanding of how God's just and merciful laws have to be reinterpreted in that context. In a similar way we require a radical change of direction, a change of heart and mind, a transformation of our society towards a sustainable economy and a sustainable lifestyle (p. 57-58).

19. In reflecting on the content of Christian hope there is also a need for appropriate theological metaphors and models. In this document we suggest concepts such as liberation, reconstruction, reconciliation, healing, stewardship, wisdom and the well-being of the whole household of God. In the context of climate change we will probably need a whole array of such models to help us to discern the challenges, to guide us in our decision making and to inspire us with a vision of hope (p. 58-61).

20. If our collective inability to address climate change is not due to a lack of information or technology, but a lack of moral imagination, courage and leadership, it will not be sufficient merely to issue yet more prophetic calls upon Christians and others to respond. Although we know that we need to do something, we find ourselves unable to muster sufficient courage and moral energy to do what is required. The danger is that we can seek to respond to this enormous challenge through our own strength and our own efforts. We therefore act as if we have to do what we can to save the planet ourselves. We fail to take our own message seriously. We reduce the gospel of God's work in Jesus Christ to save the world from sin and destruction to the feeble call upon Christians and others to make a difference themselves. Instead, we need to explore from within our context the resources of Christianity to offer a message to the world that is so sorely needed (p. 61-63).

21. In the Jewish-Christian tradition God's law is not regarded as something onerous but as a source of wisdom and joy. It provides a sense of direction that God's faithful gratefully receive. In this document we describe a set of new commandments for an age of climate change. These directives should best be regarded as signs of grace, not as a burden or a threat (p. 63-72).

22. In conclusion, in the form of a doxology derived from the Machakos statement of 2002, we reflect, from within the African context, on the significance of the affirmation that the Earth belongs to God (p. 72-75).

# **1. Climate change on the agenda of Christians in South Africa**

## **The aims of the document**

This document emerged through a process of reflection, discussion and education amongst Christians in South Africa concerned with the challenges posed by climate change. The perspectives of Christians from quite different sectors of the South African society, across the divisions of race, class, gender, culture and language, are reflected in this document. The word “we”/“us” is therefore used in different ways – to refer to South African citizens, to Christians in South Africa, to those who have endorsed the document or to specific groups of Christians.

Although multiple voices are present, these voices speak about a common challenge and a common task to live together on a planet that we share with each other, with people from other faith traditions and numerous other forms of life. On this challenge we have to learn to speak *together* and in such a way that the voices of the victims are not dominated by others or even by their spokespersons. For Christians in South Africa, so deeply divided on the basis of race and class (and other variables), this is by no means easy. We also have to remind ourselves continuously that the victims include not only the poor and coming generations but also numerous other species affected by climate change.

The document is primarily aimed at lay and ordained Christian leaders in South Africa. The purpose of the document is to assist Christian communities to assess what is at stake in the challenges posed by climate change and to respond to such challenges from the perspective of Christian faith and practice. The aim of the document is therefore to offer prophetic witness, to recognise the sign of the times, to discern God’s word for our time; but its focus is also educational, pastoral, confessional and practical. It calls upon Christians to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2), for a transformation of our perceptions, thinking, visions, attitudes, orientation, habits, priorities, practices and institutions.

This form of prophetic witness is primarily aimed at churches and speaks to the wider society only on that basis. We recognise that others may be overhearing (perhaps with suspicion) what Christians are saying



amongst themselves. This is not a form of prophecy that safely allocates the blame elsewhere and that merely reiterates a call to do something – which those in government or in the corporate world may not even hear or read, let alone listen to or respond to. It is aware of the temptation to speak as if Christians can occupy some moral high ground, especially on the issue of climate change. Instead, this document recognises that the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, that it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart and that it pierces through our own practices, habits and institutions (Heb 4:12). Indeed, God’s “judgment begins with the household of God” (1 Pet 4:17). As God’s “chosen people” we are particularly accountable.

This is a form of prophetic witness that gives weight to the voices of the many victims of society and of climate change. As is widely predicted, climate change will hit those of us who are already vulnerable (and have been so for a long time) the hardest – the poor, rural people, the elderly, the sick, women and children. Moreover, climate change will also affect numerous other forms of life that do not have a voice in human decision making processes. In continuity with other forms of prophetic witness emerging from within the South African context we therefore wish to listen to the voices of the victims in our own midst, including the theological questions that are raised in the process. These questions centre on suffering, God’s promises, God’s care and God’s faithfulness. At the same time, some of us also need to recognise the temptation to speak on behalf of others (especially the victims of society, including other species) too eagerly, too confidently, too assertively. To be able to verbalise one’s thoughts quicker than others may be pretentious and does not necessarily imply that one is right.

On this basis, this document seeks to discern God’s word for our times and to assist Christian communities, within the larger household of God, to respond appropriately to the challenges ahead. In speaking of “our times” we are aware of the dangers of shallow, distorted or biased social analyses that cannot come to grips with the situation and of dressing up social analysis as if that would by itself amount to the Word of God. In speaking of “God’s word” we are aware of the danger of speaking on God’s behalf as if we were God. We acknowledge that we do not possess the truth, that there is a difference between our perceptions of the truth and the Truth that we confess, that we are nothing more than witnesses to the grace that we have received. In “discerning” God’s word, we recognise the need to speak in continuity with our fathers and

mothers in the Christian faith and in solidarity with our brothers and sisters. We also acknowledge that we read the biblical texts in rather different ways. This is partly due to the rich diversity in the Bible and in the Christian tradition. However this can scarcely hide the deep divisions that continue to hamper the plausibility of Christian witness.

In terms of the method followed, the document assumes a tension between action and reflection. It thereby offers theological reflection on the existing responses of churches to climate change. It is structured in terms of the ongoing spiral of acting, seeing, judging and acting anew. Thus it describes current responses by churches on the basis of ecclesial analysis (“acting”), it investigates what is at stake on the basis of a social analysis of the context (“seeing”), it discerns the roots of the problem from the perspective of the Christian faith on the basis of theological discernment (“judging”) and it seeks to deepen a Christian response on the basis of pastoral planning (“acting anew”).

The term “action” is used here to describe the worship (*leitourgia*), proclamation (*kerugma*), fellowship (*koinonia*), service (*diakonia*) and witness (*marturia*) of Christian communities in South Africa. For this reason, a need was also recognised to produce, alongside this document, appropriate resources for Christian worship, preaching, Bible study, Christian education and guidelines for appropriate practical responses to climate change from within local Christian communities. Such resources should be available in a wide range of genres, including prayers, hymns, posters, lyrics, poetry, DVD’s, colouring books, T-shirts, bite-size chunks for reflection in internet chat-rooms, etc. Especially needed are stories about what Christians have done concretely – with all the failures and successes that this may entail. This document offers an extended theological statement that may serve as a basis document for such other resources.

## **Climate change as a challenge to Christians**

We as Christians in South Africa often find ourselves in two minds when faced with the challenges posed by climate change:

- On the one hand we are called to embody a spirit of hope; on the other hand we often share a sense of gloom over the many ills of our society, our continent and the planet in which we live.
- Although some Christians recognise the seriousness of the challenges posed by climate change, this is often dwarfed by numerous other social

concerns in our context. It is indeed hard to know what should receive the priority and how to energise action in this matter.

- Some fear that they will become victims of climate change and other forces well beyond their control; some recognise their involvement and guilt in contributing to the problem; many others are ignorant or unconcerned about the threats of climate change, probably since these seem to remain invisible and long-term.
- As citizens of a so-called emerging economy (in South Africa) we have no immediate obligations in terms of international treaties to reduce our carbon emissions. We nevertheless also recognise that our industries are polluting heavily and that our carbon emissions per capita are far above the global average.
- Some Christians are beneficiaries of the consumer society and the many advantages that accompany that, while the majority of Christians in Southern Africa find themselves marginalised by the forces that control the global economy. Some Christians form part of what may be termed the “consumer class” (see Addendum D), while most others desire and aspire to follow a similar lifestyle. We recognise that this lifestyle lies at the heart of the culture that brought about climate change, that this lifestyle cannot be followed by all people in a sustainable manner and that it will be crucial to address the inequalities in this regard.

In reflecting on the challenge of climate change from a Christian perspective, another tension has to be addressed. Those countries that have contributed most to climate change are also countries that are associated, at least from an historic perspective, with (Western) Christianity. As citizens of a southern country on the African continent, which has historical ties with both the North-West and the North-East, we may wish to distance ourselves from responsibility for the impact of industrialisation on climate change. Yet, we are also the direct or indirect beneficiaries (and victims!) of such industrialisation.

Moreover, as Christians in dialogue with people of other living faiths we cannot distance ourselves from our Christian brothers and sisters elsewhere in the world. Indeed, Christianity is as much part of the problem underlying climate change as it may be part of an appropriate response to that. Likewise, during the 1980s many church leaders in South Africa dedicated themselves to the struggle against apartheid, but belonged to churches that failed to do that. As church leaders they could not distance themselves from responsibility for what their brothers and sisters did, even though that would have been the easy option.

An even deeper ambivalence characterises prophetic witness on climate change. The “prophets” who are typically issuing warnings about climate change do not do so in the name of Christianity or even from a religious perspective. Those who have taken the lead and have called for moral vision and moral leadership include scientists, consultants, politicians and journalists. Their work is in fact being undermined by (religious) prophets of doom and destruction who typically evoke fear, not hope. This leads to an inability to confront the stark challenges ahead. Moreover, the driving forces behind economic globalisation are often associated with a vocal form of right-wing Christianity. Christians in South Africa and elsewhere in the world therefore find themselves in an uncomfortable position. They are being addressed in a prophetic mode instead of exercising their own prophetic responsibility.

Moreover, as many churches have had to admit, climate change seldom receives a priority on the social agenda of the church. This implies that Christians cannot speak about climate change with any degree of moral authority. Unlike Christian witness from within the South African context in the past, we have to recognise that we do not occupy the moral high ground and cannot speak from such a position – as if we are able to recognise what is at stake more clearly than others, as if our judgement is particularly sound, as if the right is on our side, as if we can call upon others to do what should be done because we have been doing that.

To summarise, we do not occupy the moral high ground because Christianity is considered by many to be part of the problem, not the solution to it; because others have been acting as prophets; because South Africa’s carbon emissions are so high; because human-induced climate change results from economic production and consumption involving lifestyle issues and because the ideology of consumerism affects both the affluent and the poor, albeit in diverging ways. *Any form of Christian witness in the context of climate change will therefore be to expose oneself to the judgement of others – who may well urge us to measure ourselves with the measure that we employ* (cf. Matt 7:1-5).

## **Climate change as a moral, cultural and spiritual challenge**

The content of the message coming from the scientific experts on climate change is no longer ambiguous. There can be no doubt that climate change is by far the most threatening environmental concern and that it

will affect almost every aspect of our lives in the coming decades. It is therefore not only an environmental issue – which only some activists need to be concerned about. At stake are the very foundations of industrialised civilisation and indeed life on this planet. What is required to address climate change is a fundamental reorientation of the entire global economy. What needs to be changed are the sources of energy on which all economic activities rely – away from fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas towards sustainable alternatives. Moreover, this will have to be done within four decades (if a stabilisation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is to be reached by 2050) – of which the first decade will be the most crucial. The decision to redirect the global economy has to be taken soon (probably in Copenhagen in December 2009) since it will necessarily take a long time to change its direction.

Climate change cannot be tackled merely through providing more information or prompting further planning. This problem cannot be resolved only on the basis of advanced forms of technology. The hope for quick technological fixes, that will leave consumerist ways of living untouched, has to be unmasked as false. This is less a problem of know-what or know-how than of know-why and know-wherefore. The crisis that we have to face is not merely an ecological one, but also a cultural crisis that touches on all aspects of life in the consumer society. Indeed, it is a deadly sign of cultural failure. This indicates that the values underlying the dominant global cultural and economic practices have become bankrupt. The problem lies not outside but inside ourselves, not in the ecosystem but in the human heart, in our attitudes, aspirations and orientations, in our priorities, habits, practices and institutions.

In the light of these cultural and spiritual dimensions of the challenge, the pervasive culture of consumerism is of crucial significance. As Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople has observed: “Climate change is much more than an issue of environmental preservation. Insofar as human-induced, it is a profoundly moral and spiritual problem. To persist on the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly. It is no less than suicidal, jeopardizing the diversity of the very earth that we inhabit, enjoy and share.” This assessment is also expressed in a “Declaration on the Environment” signed by Patriarch Bartholomew I and Pope John Paul II on 10 June 2002:

What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation. The problem

is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine conversion in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act.

This document therefore does not focus on the technological roots of the problem or technological solutions to it. It takes note of scientific evidence without repeating that. It emphasises the role of appropriate policies without seeking to influence such policies directly (even though this is a very important task). It recognises a wide range of practical responses from individuals wherever they live and work, within various sectors of the economy and from various levels of government. Such responses to climate change are clearly all crucial. However, the document seeks to make a contribution that other sectors of society may not be able to do, namely to address the cultural, moral and indeed spiritual dimensions of the challenge that we are faced with. Since it recognises that Christianity (in South Africa and worldwide) is as much part of the problem as it may contribute to the solution, it focuses on that which is specific to the Christian tradition.

## **Climate change as a new Kairos**

It is therefore appropriate to see climate change as a new “kairos” – a moment of truth and of opportunity where our collective response will have far-reaching consequences. For Christians worldwide this poses a challenge, as the integrity of Christian witness and indeed of the gospel itself is at stake. In the midst of the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s Christians in South Africa also spoke of a “kairos” moment. This led to the publication of the *Kairos Document* in 1985. Since then we have been confronted with numerous other challenges – establishing democratic institutions, poverty, unemployment, the lasting legacy of our colonial and apartheid past, the HIV and Aids pandemic, the destruction of morals and family life, violence against the vulnerable, gangsterism and xenophobia, various addictions, crime, and corruption.

At this moment in history we are again called to recognise what is at stake in discerning the signs of our times. This is even more difficult than in the past. Although communities in South Africa are already experiencing the negative effects of climate change (often not recognising that as such), its full impact will become more visible only in coming

decades. Our actions in the decade that lies ahead will have long-lasting implications for many generations to come. On this basis we speak in this document of the challenges related to climate change as a coming decade of truth for God's household. It is a challenge that will require from us repentance and a fundamental change of heart, attitude and action, in short, a form of ecological conversion (*metanoia*).

## **2. Christian responses to climate change (“Acting” and the need for ecclesial analysis)**

### **Recognising the role of attitudes and perceptions**

In understanding what is at stake with regard to Christian responses to climate change, it is important to start with people's perceptions and attitudes towards this issue. This is indeed a crucial part of the problem.

Relatively few literate adults in South Africa have not yet read about climate change. Although some sceptics remain who doubt the accuracy of the scientific reports, most of us comprehend intuitively what is at stake. It is not difficult to see why it has struck such a deep chord amongst ordinary people, including the very poor amongst us: we all like to talk about the weather. Those of us that have been here for many winters and those who observe the cycles of nature closely have noticed many small changes in weather patterns, in insects, plants and animal behaviour. And we wonder why this is the case. Are the ancestors angry with us? Is God displeased with us? Why? Are these signals of climate change? What is that conveying to us?

It is probably true that climate change is nowhere near the top of people's agendas in terms of what is wrong and has to be addressed in South Africa. Crime, unemployment, poverty, HIV and Aids, education, health and rural development are far more obvious and immediate concerns. When one is faced with so many immediate needs, there is little room even to consider something that still seems so distant and way into the future. Many of us do not know whether and how we will be able to feed our children tonight or tomorrow. We know the meaning of the prayer: “Give us today our daily bread.” Surely, in such a context, climate change seems very remote and not an immediate concern. It is like being advised to buy roses if your children need bread. Many would therefore ask whether it should really be a priority on the agenda of

churches in South Africa.

At the same time however, we need to recognise that the environment is not necessarily a separate item on the social agenda of the church but a dimension of all other issues. We cannot tackle anything without taking into account the intertwined issues of gender, finances, resources, health, education and the environment. While these may be separated at national level, in one's own household one necessarily has to deal with them together.

Moreover, many of us would also admit that climate change evokes some silent but pervasive fears for the future. Most of us wonder what kind of world our children and grandchildren will inherit from us. While some may be excited about technological progress, climate change has placed a damper on any easy sense of optimism. We fear living on a hotter, drier, heavily polluted planet, under a more dangerous sun, with more people to feed, more refugees, more conflict over ever-scarcer resources and much beauty irrevocably lost.

Some consider apocalyptic images associated with the flooding of coastal areas, famine, rampant diseases and a drastic reduction of the human population by the end of this century. Such concerns over the future have a bearing on how we see and live our lives today, seeing that this uncertainty undermines almost everything else. When we are fundamentally uncertain about what tomorrow will bring, it is very difficult to know what to do today and to find the energy to do anything at all. In this way climate change influences us, also those of us who have enough for the moment, more deeply than we might think.

In the process of consultation that led to this document it was especially striking to hear from the youth, from diverse sectors of the South African society, that they intuitively recognise the significance and the gravity of the problem – one that they would have to cope with in their own lifetime.

Yet, South Africans respond to media reports about climate change in very different ways. Most people probably fall under one of the following typical responses:

- *The blissfully ignorant:* Some have not even heard of climate change or have no clue what that is about. They are simply not informed. They do not know what it means. They wonder: “What are those people talking about? We have to live our lives anyway. What difference does it make to us?”



- *The probable victims:* Many of us are or will probably become the victims of climate change. In South Africa this will be related to environmental refugees from elsewhere in Africa, increased competition for jobs, changing weather patterns in particular parts of the country, a lack of drinking water resulting from that, diminishing crop yields, diseases such as malaria becoming more widespread, rising food prices and transport costs. While the affluent may have the resources to overcome challenges in terms of food, health, housing, transport and security, the poor amongst us will be unable to attend to even our most basic needs. Those of us who are vulnerable therefore intuitively fear what climate change will bring. We know that we will be hit the hardest. We admit that we are scarcely in a position to worry about other forms of life – plants and animals on the brink of extinction – that are as vulnerable as we are. We feel that this is a problem caused by others and that they have to resolve it. Often we tend to dismiss climate change as a European, white, middle class matter. We are deeply angered and embittered by the injustice of it all.
- *The unapologetic:* Those of us who are part of the consumer class may be tempted to ignore or downplay the threats of climate change. Psychologically, we often feel numbed by all the challenges that we have to face and the many demands on our attention, including the media reports on climate change. We may take modest steps such as switching our light bulbs. However, our rampant consumerist desires usually trump any reduction of our carbon footprint. We compare ourselves with those who are wealthier than us and we therefore desire to have more – better salaries, bigger houses, smarter cars, more luxurious holidays, more air travel, more financial security, exotic foods and restaurant meals. Even though we may realise that each of these items will enlarge our carbon footprint, we find it easy to rationalise that on the basis of societal pressures. We regard our spending as necessary to cope with the tiring tempo of life. We seldom remember that not every human being on earth would be able to adopt a lifestyle comparable to our's – which would cause runaway climate change. We are sometimes more concerned about the impact of climate change on “nature out there” – where we enjoy to go to for holidays – than about those who are vulnerable much closer to our homes.
- *The frustrated up and coming:* Many of us grew up in relatively poor households. After the transition to democracy in 1994, we obtained better access to education and health services. We, or at least our children, therefore sense opportunities for better jobs, a higher income

and a more comfortable lifestyle. In our neighbourhoods we experience a strong upward social mobility. If we are not yet part of the middle class, we have realistic hopes of becoming that soon. When we hear reports on climate change we feel badly cheated. It seems unfair to us that everyone cannot be as affluent as the consumer class, because, we are told, it would simply not be sustainable. Some of us have only recently rejoiced in the moment when we could switch on a light bulb for the first time in our own home. Now we are told to switch it off. For the affluent candles may be romantic, for the poor it is a necessity. How can you save something that you have never had before? Some of us have not been able to afford a car before, but we hope to have one in future, especially if safe public transport does not become readily available. Why do we have to qualify the sense of an upward social mobility and why do we have to do it just now – when we are for the first time able to entertain hopes for a better future? We have to admit that we would have contributed to the problem of carbon emissions long ago if we had an opportunity to do so. We are angered because others had such opportunities which we did not have.

- *The righteous angry*: Some of us are deeply angered by the responses to climate change of those in decision-making positions in the global economy. We just shake our heads when we hear about wastefulness, injustices and the failure to recognise what is at stake. Our anger is perhaps a righteous anger but we may well be angry with ourselves. We tend to have a guilty conscience about our own environmental impact and our carbon footprint. We recognise the need for repentance and a fundamental change of heart, mind and lifestyle, but we find it hard to change. This is partly because of decisions we have already made in terms of housing, transport, food, education, health services and financial security. We are confronted with limits to what can be changed and especially can be changed rapidly. We do not live from the joy of God's forgiveness and therefore we anxiously and frantically seek to save the planet through our own efforts – through conscientising others, through practical innovations or desperate activism.
- *The non-verbalising producers*: Some of us would argue that we are doing what we can to resolve the underlying problems in our society. We are economically active, regard entrepreneurship as crucial and find ourselves typically in positions of authority with a comfortable income. We create jobs for others on farms, in industry, business or through education. Although our personal carbon footprint may be extremely high indeed, we cannot allow ourselves to get bogged down by unhelpful feelings of guilt. We are non-verbalising producers, not

verbalising non-producers. Our task is to produce enough food, create wealth, provide infrastructure and ensure economic growth. We have a larger agenda that may include issues concerning sustainability but cannot be restricted to that. If we have to increase the country's environmental footprint in order to create jobs and help alleviate poverty, we would not hesitate. In fact, we would consider that to be our Christian duty. We are aware of the bigger picture around climate change, but can ill afford to make that our top priority at this time.

All of us probably recognise these differences amongst South Africans. We know all too well that our country is still marked by stark inequalities, despite 15 years of democracy, a constitution based on human rights and significant government spending on social services. However, most of us experience an inability to overcome such inequalities. The societal pressures and structures are so vastly complex that it is difficult to know how to address such inequalities. Thus we are tempted to allocate the blame for such problems elsewhere.

## **Recognising inadequate theological trends**

Environmental concerns such as climate change may not be a top priority on the social agenda of churches in South Africa. This should not blind us to recognise the ways in which we have indeed responded to such concerns through our perceptions, attitudes and practises. Indeed, it is impossible not to respond, seeing that no response also entails a (not so adequate) response. Moreover, we need to recognise that some Christian responses have been governed by theological assumptions that can only worsen the situation.

In line with the critique of “state theology” and “church theology” in the *Kairos Document*, we wish to highlight the following inadequate theological responses in the present context. In each case there is an element of truth which has to be recognised. However, where such a kernel of truth becomes isolated from other aspects of the Christian faith and disconnected from the context in which such Christian witness is situated, such forms of Christianity soon become radically distorted. Such a theology, if it could be termed that, may well become heretical. As we recognise such heresies in our own midst and in our own hearts, we call on others to recognise and resist such theological trends as well.

- *Mastery theology*: This theology is typically based on the divine command in Genesis 1:27 to “subdue the earth” and to “rule over it”. It also builds on Psalm 8 which portrays human beings as the “crown of

creation”. Accordingly, this theology suggests that God has created the entire universe for the sake of human beings. We may therefore use natural resources for our benefit as we deem appropriate. Sometimes such a mastery theology is softened towards a theology of dominion or stewardship in order to emphasise our human responsibility to use such resources wisely and frugally. However, a position of immense power and authority is still attributed to human beings. We entitle ourselves to rule over others, especially other species. We all too easily justify it to ourselves why we may kill and eat other animals or use them for our experiments. Often this is associated with (adult) male power and authority. There can be little doubt about the need to exercise such human responsibility, especially given the impact of human-induced climate change. Nevertheless the way in which the place of humanity in God’s own creation is understood is arrogant, makes little cosmological sense and is easily abused to endorse unsustainable practices.

- *Escapist theologies*: There are many Christians who would resist the reduction of the Christian faith to the social agenda of the church. Accordingly, they emphasise that which is spiritual more than which is material, the soul more than the body, heaven more than earth, the life to come more than this life. This may well lead to a form of escapism where present realities are not addressed in the hope for the proverbial “pie in the sky when you die, bye and bye”. The Christian message of redemption in Jesus Christ is understood as salvation *from* the earth and scarcely as the hope for the salvation *of* the whole earth. The God who redeems us has little to do with the God who created the world. At worst, such Christians are not concerned about climate change since they await the destruction of heaven and earth on religious grounds. They read reports on imminent catastrophes as ways of hastening the return of Jesus Christ to rescue the elect from this earthly “vale of tears”. The looming threats of climate change, tipping points and nuclear disasters have provided ample images for such language. Such a message of doom and destruction typically elicits fear, not hope. Those who play on the fears of others are culpable and only strengthen the worst suspicions against Christianity amongst outsiders. Fear alone leads to an incapacity to confront the challenges. By contrast Christian hope also provides inspiration for Christians to work for the coming of God’s reign on earth, as it is in heaven.
- *Inculturation theologies in the context of consumerism*: Christians are not called to avoid that which is worldly. They may embrace various expressions of culture as given by God. This is especially the case in a context where African cultures were often portrayed as inferior. In such

a context the need arises to affirm culture. However, Christians also need to be vigilant and guard against any easy identification of the gospel with a particular culture. When a church becomes a carbon (!) copy of the consumer society in which we live, this would be to lose the critical edge of the gospel in a context of climate change. It is extremely easy to adapt the gospel to fit a society geared to meet the needs, wants and desires of religious consumers. Then we merely conform to the thought patterns of this age (Romans 12:2), an age of selfishness and greed. We will return to this aspect below.

- *Blaming theologies*: The Christian notions of sin and of forgiveness of sins are sometimes criticised for being generalised. Some would say that we are all equally guilty and the gospel of forgiveness is therefore proclaimed to all. This fails to comprehend the ways in which domination in the name of the differences of gender, race, class, education, sexual orientation and species are so deeply embedded in our societies. Moreover, it is important to recognise how the victims of society tend to become psychologically numbed by decades of oppression. Oppression can easily become internalised when we accept our status as “inferior” citizens as ascribed by those in positions of power. In such a context, a bit of pleasure may provide some compensation for our inner hurt. As long as this hurt is not healed, the victims of society should clearly not be blamed for whatever little they contribute to climate change. In response, many Christians have suggested a distinction between those who are sinners and those who are sinned against. Jesus of Nazareth called sinners to repentance but showed mercy to the victims of society. This is particularly important in the context of climate change where those who will be the likely victims in the African context have contributed little if anything to the problem (except perhaps in the form of cutting down trees for charcoal, firewood or for farming). We do not contribute equally to the problem, nor do we bear an equal responsibility for we occupy different positions of power in society. This is indicated by the economic inequalities and injustices that characterise the South African context. Nevertheless, there is an unhelpful tendency to view victims necessarily as purely innocent, to always attribute problems to forces from the outside, beyond our control (“blame it on colonialism, imperialism, racism and apartheid”), never to accept responsibility for the ills of society. Sometimes we hold onto histories that we do not have. Sometimes we hold onto our pain because it gives us leverage. Then we do not really desire healing because our identity is so deeply shaped by what we can rightfully complain about. Moreover, people are all too often both victims and perpetrators (as in the case of gangsterism

and marriage trouble). In the face of climate change we have to accept collective responsibility as a species for the damage we are causing. We are in trouble together and will only resolve the coming crisis if it is done together. In the context of consumerism we have to be aware of the ways in which our rampant desires have fuelled the economy and have spiralled beyond control. Although the consumer class have led the way in this regard, sadly, we who belong to the lower middle class also desire that which we do not have. When it comes to a love of money, it may well be true that those who have it the least, love it the most. Here some pastoral sensitivity is clearly required to focus on the most serious sources of the problem and not to heap guilt upon the innocent or to induce feelings of guilt (that can only inhibit an appropriate response). At the same time we must fathom the secret corners of the human heart with honesty and integrity. Even this recognition, namely that climate change can only be addressed together (by the consumer class *and* the poor), can easily be used to underplay the priority of issues concerning justice and equity.

- *The prosperity gospel*: The prosperity gospel flourishes on an element of truth, but also systematically distorts that the same truth. The element of truth here is gratitude for God's blessings – including very concrete and material blessings such as enough rain on time, today and tomorrow's bread on the table, protection on the roads, success with one's studies, deliverance in times of crisis and enough income to live from. In certain instances money indeed can be the way in which God would bless people. For those trapped in poverty, to refrain from alcohol and drug abuse, visiting prostitutes, borrowing money and gambling, and at the same time to engage in honest hard work, spend money frugally, and be committed to the needs of one's family may well lead to increasing prosperity in a material sense of the word. Who would deny that this is a concrete sign of God's blessings? Moreover, the prosperity gospel may easily be misused to legitimise a sense of "upward social mobility". There are some of us who are for the first time entering the (lower) middle class in South Africa. We realise that we may not have received an adequate education, but that there are opportunities available for our children. If we can escape from the temptations of a culture of poverty, with some hard work and dedication, we can make it in life. We may soon be able to live in a suburban flat or house of our own, buy a car and perhaps become part of the consumer class. Pastors in such areas typically support such a sense of upward social mobility. They emphasise the role of talents and opportunities for education and training and speak of grabbing such possibilities as being God's will. Although the

lifestyles of the consumer class is not sustainable for all on earth, this theological undergirding for a sense of upward social mobility is again quite understandable, to say the least. It inspires church members to aim higher, to believe in themselves and thus to work harder so that they can reach the top (whatever that might mean). However, the prosperity gospel may also be misused to encourage overt forms of affluence. In many cases the underlying assumption is that, if you give your best to the Lord (and for the coffers of the local congregation), you will receive rich blessings from God. Thus such blessings become signs of the authenticity of one's faith (and of the pastor's leadership). If you do not receive such blessings, your faith is at fault. In such instances charismatic leadership often becomes abusive. That is when the prosperity gospel becomes heretical. It all too easily gives a divine blessing to institutionalised selfishness and greed. The portrayal of the gospel in terms of success, prosperity and wealth will become increasingly influential in the South African context. That is especially with regard to the growth of forms of Pentecostalism where the prosperity gospel is preached, the role of tele-evangelism and the broadcasting of religious programmes of this nature.

## **Recognising existing Christian responses**

There may be some who suppose that climate change is scarcely on the agenda of the church, that Christians are “silent” on climate change and that virtually nothing is being done in this regard. In many respects such assumptions are probably valid, also in South Africa. However, this is simply not true in all cases. It is neither necessary, nor appropriate to defend Christian engagement on issues of climate change here. It may be helpful, though, to articulate what Christians have been doing in order to fathom the strengths and limitations in this regard.

- Many congregations have introduced earthkeeping concerns in their worship services and in various aspects of the liturgy. Some are celebrating Environmental Sunday (closest to World Environment day on 5 June) on an annual basis while others have introduced a Season of Creation in the church calendar (in the six weeks after 1 September). Already a wealth of material is available for the liturgy, preaching, hymns, prayers and catechism. Such liturgical innovation may not have an immediate impact on an issue such as climate change, but in the long run this will be crucial. The liturgy helps us as Christians to learn gradually to see the world through God's eyes – with infinite compassion. On that basis it may lead to a fundamental reorientation of all other aspects of

our lives. Admittedly, one also has to consider the direct impact of the liturgy on climate change – in terms of transport to the church, the environmental footprint of church buildings and the paper consumed.

- There is a new movement toward the notion of an “eco-congregation”. This is especially strong in the UK but the notion is also being adopted and adapted by local congregations within South Africa. This signals a commitment to introduce environmental concerns in the liturgy, address the environmental footprint of the congregation, raise an environmental awareness through teaching and promote specific environmental projects appropriate to its context and capabilities.
- Christian organisations and/or church groups have introduced a wide range of local earthkeeping projects, including projects to offset carbon emissions. These include projects such as tree planting, water harvesting, organic vegetable gardens, recycling, indigenous church gardens and “living graveyard campaigns”. It also entails outdoor youth and family activities to promote the love of nature, nature conservation projects focusing on habitat, wildlife or indigenous plants, job creation projects in the field of appropriate technology, the development of teaching material and networks to communicate such work to others.. Admittedly, these projects remain all too few and far between, the organisation is often hampered by administrative and financial problems, while the negative impact of such projects on climate change (e.g. in terms of transport used) is often not factored in.
- Christian organisations and church structures at various levels have grappled with economic injustices and inequalities. Some have focused their energies in assisting the poor in very practical ways. Others have worked for the upliftment or “development” of local communities. Yet others have addressed the structural causes of poverty in terms of the policies, institutions and systems that contribute to the problem. Such work cannot be separated from concerns over climate change since the same processes that reinforce economic inequalities are also contributing to human-induced climate change.
- By far the most significant contribution that Christians can and do make to address environmental concerns is through the actions of the laity – individuals acting in responsible ways wherever they live and work. Numerous Christians in Southern Africa have a wealth of expertise and may sometimes exert significant influence in each and every sector of society. There can be no doubt about the responsibility that Christian farmers, politicians, administrators, engineers, town planners, architects and teachers – to mention only a few professions – have in this regard.



This is not to discount the various inputs of workers on farms, in mines, factories and offices or in the transport industry who exercise responsibility in countless daily decisions, for example in their use of energy.

- Equally important are the ways of life adopted and promoted by Christian families – where they live their daily lives. Here one may consider practical decisions made on issues such as housing, food, shopping, lighting, electricity, transport and so forth. In such Christian families virtues such as gratitude, generosity, frugality, simplicity, temperance, justice and above all wisdom are cultivated and embodied. Here children can also learn to love God and to enjoy and appreciate the good gifts of God's creation.
- Some Christians have offered courageous prophetic witness to address environmental damage and various forms of pollution. However, it has to be admitted that environmental activists have more often than not embarrassed Christians through their vigilance and commitment. It also has to be acknowledged that too many Christian resolutions, on climate change or on other matters, have called from a safe distance on others to act with no costs involved for the ones who offer such prophetic witness. It comes as no surprise that such witnesses are easily ignored and have little impact. Often such documents are not even read within the churches wherein they were produced.
- By now a wealth of Christian literature is available on environmental concerns, including climate change. Such publications include educational material, teaching resources and theological texts. Numerous church and academic conferences have been organised, papers produced and books published. This is certainly also true within the South African context. Such work has undoubtedly helped to raise environmental awareness and has assisted Christians to relate their faith to earthkeeping practices. This may well be crucial in the transformation of our minds and hearts and actions. Admittedly, it is not yet clear that such theological reflection has actually led to lifestyle changes or a reduction of carbon emissions. One is left to ponder on the net carbon footprint of such work – for example if air transport to conferences and meetings and the use of paper are factored in against the reductions that such conferences may perhaps urge others to take.

Addressing climate change is a task that has to be tackled through global efforts. Politicians, business leaders, scientists, analysts, educators, journalists, community leaders and religious leaders alike will all have to make contributions to take on the problem. Churches can only play a minor supporting role in this regard. Nevertheless it is important *to raise*

*the question whether the existing responses are really in line with the gravity and the global scale of the problem.* Although these responses may be sincere and the admirable commitment shown, will this really be enough, even if everyone (or all Christians) were to follow such examples? Or is this, yet again, a matter of doing too little, too late?

It is important to recognise what is at stake in this question. Those of us in the urban middle class find it difficult to adopt a lifestyle that is not harmful to the environment. We may take some modest steps to address climate change – such as reducing the use of electricity, water, transport and chemicals, while recycling and re-using resources. Such steps are highly appropriate to challenge consumerist habits and demand considerable effort and dedication. However, a guilty conscience and a 10% reduction in resource usage would not nearly be sufficient, given the scale of the problem. By contrast, those of us who are poor lack the resources to alter our squalid living conditions and to steer away from the (comparatively minute) environmental damage that we do cause. We naturally desire to obtain more of the wealth that we observe around us – but we can scarcely be concerned about the impact that what we desire (but do not yet have and perhaps have little hope in getting) would have.

This question obviously requires some clarity on the causes, scope and scale of imminent climate change. In the next section on “seeing”, these aspects will be investigated in more detail.

### **3. Investigating what is at stake (“Seeing” and the need for social analysis)**

#### **Seeing the analyses of scientific experts on climate change**

There is no need here to repeat the analyses and predictions of scientists and other experts on the scope and the potential impact of climate change. A wealth of literature is available on that – in the media, in books and pamphlets and on the internet for those who have access. As Christians in South Africa we have the duty to familiarise ourselves with such material and keep ourselves updated according to our context and level of education. We therefore refrain from including any such information, also because we cannot claim the expertise to do so. We recognise that the widely endorsed reports of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are considered to be the most reliable

source of information in this regard. If anything, these reports would underestimate the extent of the problem since only well-established scientific evidence is taken into account. In addition, we need to warn against the danger of giving equal weight to the positions of climate sceptics compared to for example the IPCC reports – presumably in the name of adopting a balanced position. As is often argued, such climate sceptics attract more attention from the media (due to the hype associated with that) than from the scientific community.

For Christian discernment with regard to such analyses by experts on climate change a number of observations are important:

Firstly, we need to acknowledge the very strong correlation between the concentration of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere and the global average surface temperature. In layperson's terms, one may point out a widespread recognition that climate change is induced by human lifestyles and that global heating is more or less inevitable as a result of the greenhouse gases already emitted into the earth's atmosphere. This is because the greenhouse gases function like a blanket preventing more of the sun's heat from being reflected from the earth. Such a rise in the global average temperature leads to the melting of polar ice and glaciers and therefore to more water that becomes part of the weather cycles. It is also associated with a slow but sure rise in sea levels as ice melts and water expands as a result of increasing temperatures – which could lead to changing coastlines and flooding of low-lying areas.

Such a temperature rise will also lead to multiple changes in specific areas and ecosystems. Some will become wetter, others drier. Some will become hotter, others colder. In the process the fluctuations in weather patterns and extreme weather events – storms, winds, rains and droughts – will become more frequent and more severe. We note, for example, the predictions that the Western half of South Africa may become drier and more drought-prone than it is now, while parts of the Eastern half may become wetter. Such changes in the weather patterns will have an impact on all forms of life, including humans. Numerous species will not be able to survive drastic changes. Already we hear stories from within South Africa about the plight of rooibos farmers, the spread of malaria, flooding in KwaZulu-Natal, and problems everywhere related to food security. We are all faced with rising food prices and transport costs and wonder what is happening.

Secondly, we realise that such changes in the climate are extremely complex and have to be understood as a function of the cycles of carbon

in the biosphere. We breathe out carbon dioxide and we release carbon into the atmosphere whenever we burn wood, coal, gas or oil. Such carbon is again absorbed through the process of photosynthesis in plants and through carbon sinks for example in the ocean. On this basis we need to explain to ourselves why we are releasing so much more carbon into the atmosphere than previously. The simple answer has to do with the burning of fossil fuels such as oil, coal and natural gas. But it also focuses on cutting down forests as well as the methane released by domestic animals such as cows.

Thirdly, we also need to understand how we are contributing to the burning of fossil fuels ourselves. We do so sometimes more and sometimes less directly:

- We burn fossil fuels when we use coal or gas stoves, use electricity (in South Africa mainly derived from coal) or when we travel by car, taxi, bus, train or aeroplane.
- We buy and use various products that required energy to be produced for our sake. This applies to the food that we eat, the goods we consume and the appliances we utilise. The full life cycle of every product has to be taken into account. Consider the so called “embodied energy” in a can of soft drink: the energy required for mining aluminium, to transport the raw material to the factory, the considerable energy required for melting aluminium, the industries required to produce the soft drink, the packaging involved, the transport required to take it to a supermarket, the costs to build and maintain the supermarket, the refrigeration costs, the transport costs to take the soft drink to one’s home, the need for refrigeration there and the recycling of the can after its content has been consumed. In addition one has to consider the role of marketing the product and the extensive networks required. In each case the role of the workers and management staff overseeing the process also has to be factored in – including their business meetings, office space, and work-related transport. Of course, such energy has to be divided for a single can of soft drink, but considerable energy is required for each aspect – far more than the energy that it provides in the form of nutrition.
- A large percentage of energy is used on our behalf in the public sphere. Consider the construction of roads and railways, telecommunication services, streetlights, shopping malls, sports venues, airports, government buildings and educational facilities. In each case such energy is not used equally since the consumer class benefit from and make use of such facilities more than the poor. The poor suffer the negative effects of

such facilities more than the affluent do (consider the noise pollution from highways and the dangers posed to children's safety).

Fourthly, we need to acknowledge that South Africa's position in terms of carbon emissions is ambiguous. Since our economy is classified as a "developing" one, we have some freedom to expand our carbon footprint – under current international proposals to address climate change. However, at the same time, carbon emissions in South Africa are very high. According to the latest *Human Development Index*, South Africa contributed 436.8 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2004. [These figures are for carbon dioxide emissions only, i.e. emissions stemming from consumption of solid, liquid and gaseous fossil fuels, as well as from gas flaring and the production of cement.] This makes South Africa the country with 12<sup>th</sup> highest CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the world!

Finally, given the global economic inequalities, also reflected in South Africa, it is important to translate such figures on a per capita basis. We are told by experts that carbon emissions of approximately 2 tons per person (on the basis of the 1990 world population) would be sustainable since the earth's biosphere would be able to absorb such greenhouse gases, for example through photosynthesis. This has to be compared with the global average of 4.5 tons of carbon emissions in 2004/5. Moreover, since 1990 the world's human population has increased from 5.2 to 6.7 billion. This difference between the current global emissions per person and sustainable emissions lies at the very heart of the challenge facing us.

Such figures still mask the inequalities in terms of carbon emissions. South Africa's carbon emission was 9.8 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per person in 2004/5, up from 9.1 tons in 1990. This can be compared with 20.6 tons per person in the USA and 0.2 tons in Zambia. The share of the income and expenditure of the most affluent 10% of South Africa's population of 47.5 million people (in 2004) was 44.7%. On this basis one may calculate their annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to be around 41.1 tons per person (if the use of energy in the public sphere is treated on the same basis). Even that hides the difference between children growing up in a consumer class home and their parents who travel far more extensively (usually because of work).

This explains why climate change has to be regarded as an issue of justice. Those who contributed relatively little to the problem will suffer disproportionately worse from the impact of the climate change. This becomes even more obvious if not only the current emissions per year

are taken into account but the total emissions per country since the industrial revolution. Here the countries of Western Europe and North America, traditionally associated with Christianity, bear a special responsibility.

## **Seeing the recommendations of policy makers**

As Christians in South Africa we also have to take into account the recommendations of policy makers and analysts. It is crucial to familiarise ourselves with such policies. These generally cover two themes, namely 1) ways of reducing the greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere ("mitigation") and 2) assisting those affected by climate change ("adaptation").

### **a) Mitigation**

By now considerable consensus prevails in secular literature on climate change as to what appropriate targets for addressing climate change would amount to. If the mean surface temperature of the earth (which has remained stable around 15°C since the end of the last ice age 15 000 years ago) would rise by more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels, this may have catastrophic consequences. The temperature has already risen by around 0.75°C above pre-industrial levels. An increase beyond 6°C may well lead to the collapse of the Earth's biosphere on a scale similar to the Permian extinction 251 million years ago when a series of volcanic eruptions produced large quantities of sulphur dioxide and carbon dioxide that warmed the planet by between 6°C and 8 °C, triggering the extinction of around 96% of all marine species and 70% of terrestrial vertebrate species.

In order to prevent that, the levels of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere have to be stabilised between 450 and 490 particles per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide and its equivalents. The current level is 430 ppm (380 ppm for carbon dioxide itself) and this has been rising at 2.54 ppm over the last decade (1.8 ppm for the previous decade). The stabilisation of the levels of carbon dioxide and its equivalents around 550 ppm would imply a global average temperature increase of around 3°C.

In order to achieve such stabilisation, the global greenhouse gas emissions have to be reduced by 2050 by at least 50% compared to 1990 levels. In order to allow impoverished countries to increase their use of fossil fuels, industrialised countries will have to cut their emissions by

around 80%. Such a reduction will require quite drastic measures within the first decade already.

It is difficult for any one of us to comprehend the scope of this enormous challenge. In short, this will require the entire global economy to move away from fossil fuels such as oil, coal and natural gas as the main sources of energy in order to find more sustainable alternatives. This has to be done within only a few decades. In the section below on “Renewed Acting”, we will return to what the church may be called to do in response to this challenge.

Over the last two decades very significant international efforts were made to address the challenge of mitigation. Such efforts are symbolised by the work done at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol of 1997, the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002, the Bali Summit in 2007 and the Copenhagen Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 15) planned for December 2009. Such efforts focus rightly on appropriate policy making and the legal frameworks within which the challenge of mitigation can be addressed. Such policies cover a wide range of issues concerning energy and emission targets, economic production, trade, technology and so forth.

These crucial issues need not be addressed or repeated here. The South African government has recognised this as a priority through its Long Term Mitigation Scenarios. In decades to come this should affect policy making in every sphere of society. Together with other environmental organisations we welcome such policies in principle but will monitor further developments in this regard vigilantly.

We also recognise that such policies have to be understood in the context of the politics of globalisation and the conflict between the major power blocs internationally. We enter a time when the USA may be losing its position of dominance, South East Asian countries are becoming major role players and European countries reposition themselves on the basis of renewing and exporting technologies. In such a time there is a tendency to regard Africa as only relevant insofar as it can supply raw materials and offer markets to export surplus products. In a time of financial crisis the powerful first seek to safeguard their own interests. Finance for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals is thus hard to come by. We therefore fear that such political interests will dominate the Conference of the Parties and trump concerns about mitigation or adaptation (see below).

Christians in South Africa are called to follow such developments and to exercise prophetic vigilance according to their position in society and level of education. We are grateful that the World Council of Churches has taken the lead in this regard through its task team on climate change. We will return to this aspect in the section on “Renewed action” below.

## **b) Adaptation**

Secondly, churches worldwide have been at the forefront of emphasising the need to assist victims of climate change. There is no need here to repeat the predictions on the impact of climate change. However, we do need to emphasise that a collective failure to meet targets for mitigation will of course make the task of adaptation much more difficult. Economists have observed that the impact of climate change may still be handled economically if the rise in average global surface temperature does not exceed 2°C above pre-industrial levels. This is for example argued in the influential report by Sir Nicholas Stern and subsequently by many activist groups. However, more recently, analysts have warned that we may have to plan for a rise in temperature of around 3°C and face up to the possibility of a rise of up to 6°C, perhaps even by the end of this century. Since such changes would be completely unprecedented in the history of humanoid species, it would be very difficult to know what to expect.

At an international level, strategies will be required for adapting to changed climatic conditions – ranging from suggestions to build higher dykes in the Netherlands, policies to prevent the spread of malaria in southern Africa to the evacuation of some Pacific islands that would no longer be habitable. In addition to such adaptation measures, plans for disaster relief would be necessary. It will require budget reserves and appropriate plans to prevent disasters with the same devastating effects from occurring. Since such strategies are likely to remain insufficient, structures will have to be put in place to respond to more frequent requests for emergency help and to relieve the plight of millions of environmental refugees.

Such assistance and emergency measures are often thwarted when powerful institutions face an economic, financial or military/security crisis. Then the tendency is to attend to one’s own interests first. Thus, at a time of financial crisis as experienced in 2008, politicians tend to be more worried about the standard of living of their voters than about the



global poor. Likewise, when security threats emerge – as will be increasingly likely due to conflict over scarce resources – these tend to override any concerns over sustainability. In such a context, when love tends to “grow cold”, churches can and have played a crucial role in assisting the victims, including those of climate change.

## **Seeing beneath the surface: The structural causes of climate change**

For Christians it is not enough merely to hear what others are saying and doing about climate change. The task of “seeing” also requires from us to see what is beneath the surface, to gain deeper insight and to understand the structural causes of climate change. In order to heal the future we need to look into the past in order to establish who is responsible and what lies at the very roots of this threat.

One may say that the root causes are economic (given the environmental impact of the global economy), but also cultural (the ways of life that people have adopted that stimulate the economy). In both cases this has been deeply distorted by various forms of what we as Christians would call *sin* – violence, greed, pride, selfishness, domination and alienation. We need to recognise that discourse on climate change is influenced by a) the production, b) the distribution and consumption and c) the various ways of understanding wealth.

### **a) The production of wealth**

The excessive *production* of wealth (understood mainly as “prosperity”) in the current global economy is based on a number of factors, spurred on by the rise of capitalism as an economic system. Each of these factors is deeply influenced by historic injustices and the legacy of imperialism, colonialism, classism, racism, sexism and cultural elitism. The factors that contribute to the production of wealth include the following:

- Access to energy sources (consider the availability and use of fossil fuels);
- natural resources, including various non-renewable resources and renewable resources such as water, soil, trees and plants and fish stocks (access to cheap sources was a driving force behind colonialism, remains crucial for many industries, leads to a current scramble for raw materials available in various African countries and are often mono-

polished by powerful economic institutions);

- land/property (consider the conquest of land through war and imperialism, ensuring political control over such resources);
- labour and employment (consider the role of slavery, the exploitation of cheap labour, the tendency towards outsourcing labour costs, the impact of trade unions and the cutting of labour costs by replacing it with technology);
- knowledge and skills (consider the role of research, ingenuity, education and training and unequal access to quality education);
- the means of production (including various forms of technology that are sometimes beneficial, sometimes destructive);
- the formation of strong institutions such as business corporations with efficient management systems which allow for the sharing of risks and give some groups a competitive advantage over others (consider the ways in which the globalised economy is dominated by powerful multinational companies and the interests of their shareholders);
- cultural values and virtues (consider the emphasis on entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation, dedication, diligence, productivity, efficiency, innovative leadership) as well as economic drives (consider the quest for progress, success, fame, affluence);
- the availability of capital to finance large new projects based on previous profits (consider the role of credit, judgements on creditworthiness and interests paid on such credit) as well as the role played by investments, shareholding and the quest for profit, interests on investments and the lucrative transfer of money or financial products where no trade in goods is involved (i.e. making money from money alone, without adding anything to economic well-being);
- access to viable markets to sell products (influenced by legislation and trade agreements) and the stimulation of consumer demands through advertising.

This analysis is crucial to comprehend the factors driving climate change and the difficulties experienced in getting to grips with it. The same factors that have led to economic inequalities have also contributed to climate change. We need to emphasise that the wealth that has been created is necessarily based on an interplay between all these factors. Some may wish to emphasise the role of cultural values, virtues and the proper management of corporate institutions. Thereby they tacitly imply that those who are poor are relatively lazy, stupid, slow,

corrupt or unlucky. By contrast, those of us who emphasise injustices typically focus on all the other factors, including access to the means of production, labour costs and unfair trade relations.

The problem is that such emphases become one-sided if the need for the production of wealth is underplayed and if we fail to recognise that all these factors are indeed required for the production of wealth. All too often ecumenical statements are not heard by those in positions of economic power because of such a one-sided emphasis.

The decisive factor in climate change is obviously the use of fossil fuels, but since this is itself a valuable commodity, it is shaped by all the other factors. It should be clear that climate change can only be addressed adequately by changing the ways in which wealth is produced. Here those involved in economic production have a huge responsibility.

However, such economic production is driven by consumer demand for economic products. This implies that climate change is a cultural matter – it is shaped by what and how much we buy, by our use of energy at home and at work and by the modes of transport we choose. Of course, the discrepancies between the purchasing power of the consumer class and the poor have to be taken into account in this regard.

## **b) The distribution of wealth**

According to the paradigm whereby the production of wealth is emphasised, it is assumed that, if the size of the proverbial economic cake can be enlarged, everyone will eventually receive a larger share. Accordingly, there will be a trickle down effect so that everyone will benefit in the end. Or, in President John F. Kennedy's famous words, "A rising tide lifts all boats." Accordingly, it is not necessary to take from the rich in order to address the plight of the poor. As long as the living conditions of the poor improve, redistribution policies are not required. That will presumably be ensured by market forces. The dominant policies to govern the problem of distribution may be captured in terms of the development of more sophisticated technologies, training and education, economic and social development, international "aid" and peace-keeping where required.

Such arguments can point to the spectacular production of wealth over the past few centuries (alas, based on fossil fuels), from which millions of people have indeed benefited. However, this is typically based on the assumption that infinite economic growth (if measured in terms of bio-

physical economic output) is possible on a finite planet. In the discussion below we will return to the notion of limits to economic growth.

Such assumptions about economic growth also underlie much of the current discourse on development. To put the problem in proverbial terms: Discourse on economic development is typically based on the assumption that it is better to teach someone how to fish in the river or lake than to give that person a fish to eat. The problem is that indigenous knowledge has been lost and must be retrieved through education and training in innovative ways. This requires financial resources in order to obtain a fishing rod and other gear. Once this is in place, one needs to ensure access to the fishing waters and fishing permits amidst other powerful role players and international regulations. Once that is in order, one may be confronted with the problem of overfishing: the fish stocks are depleted and the fish that are caught have diminished in size. Moreover, even if sufficient fish are caught, it may be difficult to get access to appropriate markets in the midst of trade agreements and regulations that favour the powerful.

Once such limitations of the production of wealth are recognised, it should be clear that it will be impossible to resolve the problem of climate change without dealing with economic inequalities. The problem of the fair distribution of wealth should also be addressed. Those with a (neo-liberal) capitalist mindset have emphasised the production of wealth as a key to creating more wealth for all. By contrast socialists and trade unionists often take such production of wealth for granted, but call for a more egalitarian *distribution* of wealth through government intervention (including taxation and black economic empowerment). Here wealth is understood in terms of finances, land or resources.

It is important to acknowledge the underlying tensions between an emphasis on the production or distribution of wealth. More emphasis on production may lead to graver inequalities while emphasis on redistribution may inhibit incentives towards the production of wealth. It is far from clear what the best strategy for the redistribution of wealth might entail (financial aid, safety nets, social welfare, a basic income grant, economic empowerment, tax reform, public works programmes, education and training, fair trade agreements) and how these can be sustained in the long run. In light of economic inequalities and the injustices associated with that, Christians are called to emphasise the need for such redistribution, even though they may not have the expertise or be in the position to implement appropriate strategies in this regard.

Thus far climate change has resulted mainly from the carbon footprint of the consumer class. However the attempts of others to copy this lifestyle will worsen the problem in years to come. Climate change is therefore deeply related to the skewed distribution of wealth. It is quite understandable that the poor, as well as those in the so-called middle class, would desire to share in the wealth that is so visibly portrayed in our society and through the media. This merely illustrates that the lifestyles of people in the consumer class are unsustainable since such lifestyles cannot be copied by all. Moreover, in years to come those of us with low carbon emissions will have to suffer the consequences of the economic activities of those with higher emissions.

The levels of consumption enjoyed by the affluent (in South Africa) therefore raise serious questions of global justice. Such consumption levels can only be sustained at the expense of others – the poor, coming generations and other living organisms. It would simply be impossible for the planet's entire human population to replicate the lifestyle of the affluent centre. The solution cannot imply a system of consumer apartheid that upholds affluent binge habits but denies the poor a decent standard of living. The affluent seemed to have wreaked environmental havoc so that they might attain a comfortable and healthy lifestyle. They are clearly not in the position to caution others not to seek a comparable standard of living, giving as reason that it would jeopardise ecological sustainability.

In the global context, it may be true (and for many quite terrifying) that countries such as China and India may soon equal or surpass countries in Europe and North America in terms of total greenhouse emissions. However, those Western countries that have traditionally been associated with Christianity would scarcely have the moral authority to require from Asian countries to reduce their per capita carbon emissions to levels that are significantly lower than their own.

It should therefore be abundantly clear that climate change raises issues of justice concerning a fair distribution of wealth, opportunities, responsibilities and also of the global costs for adaptation to the impact of climate change. Current inequalities in this regard cannot be altered overnight. The term “historical emissions” is often used to indicate the total sum of emissions per country since 1800. In other words, one cannot merely take current emissions into account; historical and future emissions should also be factored in.

In ecumenical circles this has prompted the recognition of what is

termed “ecological debt”. This is explained in a recent statement of the World Council of Churches:

Ecological debt refers to damage caused over time to ecosystems, places and peoples through production and consumption patterns; and the exploitation of ecosystems at the expense of the equitable rights of other countries, communities or individuals. It is primarily the debt owed by industrialized countries in the North to countries of the South on account of historical and current resource plundering, environmental degradation and the disproportionate appropriation of ecological space to dump greenhouse gases (GHGs) and toxic wastes. It is also the debt owed by economically and politically powerful national elites to marginalized citizens; the debt owed by current generations of humanity to future generations; and, on a more cosmic scale, the debt owed by humankind to other life forms and the planet. It includes social damages such as the disintegration of indigenous and other communities.

### **c) The redefinition of wealth**

This analysis regarding the production and the distribution of wealth indicates that there is a need, in the global as well as South African context to reconsider *our very understanding of wealth*. This has been emphasised in circles of what is termed the “new economics”, in opposition to both capitalist and socialist thinking. On this basis many have explored viable alternatives to global capitalism as an economic system.

The argument is typically that neo-liberal capitalism will almost inevitably collapse because the production of wealth is not sustainable and because of the tensions associated with economic inequalities. This system cannot easily overcome economic inequalities because of the financial incentives to shed jobs. Economic growth can only lead to job creation if the pace of growth is faster than that of job creation. The recent worldwide financial crisis is thus regarded as a symptom of a deeper systemic problem that cannot be cured with governmental interventions to get economic growth back on track. The problem lies with the growth paradigm itself.

On this basis there is a need to learn from the successes and failures of specific economic experiments at a local and national level – for example in countries such as Tanzania, Sweden and Cuba. In “new economics” circles various supplementary strategies are proposed to correct the failures of the global economy. Often such strategies focus on self-

sufficiency and available assets at the local level. Since money is often in short supply but time is equally distributed, parallel financial schemes based on hours of work done for others are promoted in order to stimulate economic activity aimed at the well-being of local communities.

In such discourse it is generally accepted that definitions of wealth in terms of the Gross Domestic Product are grossly (!) inadequate. It seeks to measure wealth in terms of what people produce, purchase, consume and own. It seems to assume that *what economists cannot count does not really count*. In response, wealth may be redefined in terms of other assets, including available resources, skills, relationships between family members and friends, support structures and community structures. Wealth is thus understood as well-being and not only in terms of money, possessions or prosperity. Indeed, the value of love, friendship, children and companionship can scarcely be expressed in monetary terms.

In traditional societies within (South) Africa wealth was measured in terms of the size of one's land, the number of cattle that one owns and the number of one's adult children. In our present context, as many have observed, wealth is indicated by certain status symbols: the house in which one lives, the cars in one's driveway, the clothes that one wear, the apparatus used and other even more luxurious material objects such as boats, holiday mansions or private jets. Others may prefer less tangible, more hidden but equally material indicators of wealth such as money in the bank or shares on the stock exchange.

Yet others who recognise that money is not everything prefer to focus on things that "no one can take away from you" (in a crime-ridden society). They therefore explore stimulating experiences such as luxurious holidays, restaurant meals, wonderful concerts or even escapades with drugs, sex or occult practices. Sadly, those of us who are poor tend to follow the same pattern. We still place our hopes and desires on what money can buy and are keen to display small symbols of increasing wealth (such as stylish clothes or cell phones). Even though we have little, we would love to have much more.

There is no doubt that those who are deprived of access to nutritious food, adequate housing, health services, education and public transport would need to increase their consumption of energy in order to adopt a decent and humane way of living. However, there are indicators that, once the most basic needs are met, well-being is not determined by increasing income or expenses. What, then, does "the good life" entail? The factors that contribute to well-being are actually well-known: they

include satisfaction with family life, especially marriage, followed by satisfaction with work, time and opportunities to develop one's talents, and friendships.

Christian communities have an urgent need to redefine wealth along such lines. Nevertheless, we need to admit that it is easy to preach this to others, but more difficult to follow because there are always felt needs that we still hope to meet. Even the super rich and famous easily fall into that trap: They long for increased security and more privacy and seek financial means to ensure that. This also illustrates the need for renewed discussions on the distinction between *basic human needs* and unsustainable desires. How could the need for housing, transport, household appliances and consumer goods be addressed in a more sustainable manner? This is a crucial task, but cannot be undertaken in this document. Here we may well tap into indigenous knowledge and wisdom, especially amongst rural communities in South Africa. Some communities remain which have resisted the lure of the consumer society and have kept alive an alternative, more sustainable way of living.

In the Bible and in the history of Christianity there are rich resources that may be explored for an alternative notion of wealth. Some call for frugality, others for temperance. Some seek wisdom, others adopt an ascetic way of life as a corrective to the excesses of consumerism. As Christians in South Africa we are often guilty of condoning economic inequalities and of conforming to the culture of consumerism around us. As long as we fail to challenge the current global economy as if there is no alternative, we are responsible for the degradation caused to our ecosystems. We are also guilty insofar as we fail to employ the resources in our own traditions to adopt an alternative notion of wealth.

## **Understanding the interplay between the production, distribution and redefinition of wealth**

There can be little doubt that the three aspects discussed above, the production of wealth, the distribution of wealth and the need for a redefinition thereof, stand in tension with one another, even though most would recognise the need to attend to all three these aspects. The ways in which Christians and others deal with such tensions are clearly different.

Here we need to be quite honest. Those who retire with a more or less adequate pension can easily talk about the need for a redefinition of wealth and can adapt their lifestyles accordingly. However, this is based



on the production and accumulation of wealth over a lifetime (or even on the basis of an inheritance). Poor Christians seldom talk about the need for a redefinition of wealth. Those who speak on behalf of workers can call for a redistribution of wealth, but that remains rather facile when they are not responsible to ensure the sufficient production of wealth. It is therefore not surprising that, *when confronted with the tensions between these three aspects, people in positions of power tend to emphasise the production of wealth above the other two aspects.*

People emphasise the need for the production of wealth both individually and collectively. Thus parents in the consumer class are quite willing to sacrifice quality time with their children in order to obtain a better income – ironically often in order to look after the needs of the family (and to send children to quality schools). Many feel the need for a double income to help maintain their standard of living. Parents who are employed, but have a low income, often work away from home or spend long hours using public transport. Likewise, economic policies tend to emphasise the production of wealth more than the other aspects.

The problem though, as we saw above, is that such an emphasis on the production of wealth is not by itself able to address the other two aspects. In fact, this tends to increase economic inequalities. A 10% increase on a salary of R30 000 per year means R3 000 extra but on a salary of R300 000 it means R30 000 extra. Baking the cake is therefore one thing, cutting it is another. As it is often stated in ecumenical circles, the rich are becoming richer while the poor are becoming poorer. Many would add that the rich are becoming richer precisely at the cost of the poor – in terms of using their labour, monopolising the available resources, controlling the markets through trade regulations and advertising and selling processed products to the poor at a higher price.

The problem is that, even where unskilled workers may be able to increase their standard of living (and thereby their carbon footprint!), they tend to fall even further behind in terms of their education and skills. Moreover, many remain unemployed and after decades some have become unemployable. It should also be noted that such an emphasis on the unequal distribution of wealth thus underplays the significance of creativity, diligence as well as effective management and administration in producing wealth (which are emphasised by those in positions of power, perhaps rightly so).

In the face of climate change it needs to be stated again that such production of wealth is not sustainable. Infinite economic growth on a

finite planet cannot be sustained and is simply not possible. It is by now quite evident that this is the case pertaining to the use of fossil fuels for energy. We cannot increase the use of fossil fuels in the same way as we have done over the previous century. It would clearly not be possible in terms of the available resources. It would also be quite impossible in terms of the destructive impact that climate change would have on such economic activity in the long run. If every family in South Africa would own and drive a private vehicle, it would cause a nightmare scenario on our roads in terms of traffic jams, pollution and increased accidents.

Would it be possible to increase the size of the global economy and the global use of energy if more sustainable energy sources (solar, wind, water) are employed? Is it not true that human ingenuity seems to know no real limits? Here some discernment is required:

- Economists observe that, except for fossil fuels, non-renewable sources are still widely available and unlikely to be depleted soon. On this basis some argue that the notion of limits to economic growth is mistaken.
- The more serious problem is, somewhat surprisingly, the sustainable use of renewable resources. This has to do with the problems of soil erosion, depletion of soil fertility, sustainable forestry, over-fishing and of maintaining biodiversity. Even if we can find alternative energy sources, it could still be disastrous to enlarge the global economy in light of the impact that this may have on the sustainable use of renewable resources in other sectors of the economy.
- An even more serious issue is the absorption of waste products in the earth's biosphere. The biosphere has a remarkable ability to recycle waste products, but this ability is limited and takes time. The most serious example, as indicated by climate change, is the absorption of carbon dioxide (an odourless and colourless, and otherwise harmless, gas). People worldwide are currently emitting more greenhouse gases (4.5 tons per person per year) than what the biosphere is able to absorb (roughly 2 tons per person per year on the basis of the 1990 global population). Similar problems include municipal waste management and the recycling of toxic and nuclear waste. Alternative sources of energy may solve this threat although it may cause new problems. Solar energy, for example, could create problems related to the recycling of batteries. Similar difficulties plague electricity generated from nuclear sources.

One may therefore conclude that real and quite rigid limits to economic growth remain, at least if measured in terms of biophysical output and if based on fossil fuels as a source of energy. This recognition cannot be

put into practice by appealing to human ingenuity. Economic inequalities therefore cannot be addressed merely through increased production.

## **Discerning the significance of the production of wealth**

Despite such an emphasis on the distribution and redefinition of wealth, it is important to understand that an emphasis on the production of wealth is not merely motivated by the interests of the affluent and the powerful. Given the current human population of 6.7 billion people, the expected rise in the human population towards 9 billion people by 2050 and the needs of the hungry and the destitute, we can ill afford to neglect the factors that contribute to the production of wealth. This is illustrated by every economic recession and by the recent global financial crisis.

People who are hit the hardest are those who are already vulnerable and who stand to lose their jobs and their houses as a result of the shrinking of economic activity. This applies, for example, to the motor industry in South Africa and elsewhere in the world where job losses leading to a downward spiral in terms of economic activity is evident. Those of us who call for a redefinition of wealth may, for a moment, wish to rejoice in the closure of such industries that are major contributors to climate change. We may call this “a blessing in disguise”. However, we would then need to accept responsibility for the devastating impact that this may have on the lives of millions of families that are affected by such closures.

It should therefore be clear that the transformation of the global economy needs to take place in a well-structured manner in order to ensure the sufficient production of wealth (especially food) in the transition period. Systems could change overnight, but only on the basis of catastrophes (associated with fires, flooding, wind storms or earthquakes). Such catastrophes may become more frequent, precisely due to climate change, but it would be irresponsible to rejoice over them. All too often we tend to think that such a catastrophe would be the only means to enforce change. Even if that was true, it would be irresponsible for us as Christians to await it, to do nothing in the meanwhile and to put our hope in something like that.

A purist position on the redefinition of wealth is therefore ill-advised. It may be attractive to dream about an agrarian, pre-industrial lifestyle, but that may arguably only be possible for a global human population of less than two billion. Likewise, any calls for wealth redistribution have

to consider how such wealth is produced in the first place. Perhaps the first step required is to inhibit wasteful economic activities (e.g. gas-guzzling cars) through taxes and appropriate incentives.

These comments illustrate the tensions between an emphasis on the production, distribution and redefinition of wealth. Discernment and ethical judgement are extraordinarily difficult in this regard. Perhaps the task of Christians could be to emphasise the aspect underplayed in a particular context. Given the dominance of the neo-capitalist economic order, it is crucial to call for a redefinition of wealth as this is so often neglected. As we will suggest below, Christians have much to contribute towards an alternative vision in this regard.

However, in other contexts it may be equally or more important to emphasise the need for a redistribution of wealth. In the Jewish-Christian tradition there are rich resources for prophetic critique against economic inequalities and expressions of solidarity with the vulnerable, the marginalised, the poor and the oppressed. Even then, it would undermine the credibility of Christian witness if we fail to recognise the need for the production of sufficient wealth to feed 6.7 billion people, to provide at least basic housing, means of public transport in urban areas and resources for health and education. In many rural contexts the production of sufficient wealth amongst impoverished communities (ensuring a sustainable livelihood) remains the primary responsibility.

## **4. Identifying the roots of the problem (“judging” and the need for theological discernment)**

### **Judging the inability to offer an alternative economic vision**

Climate change has now been on the global agenda for more than two decades. Nevertheless, despite significant international efforts, greenhouse emissions have not yet been reduced. In fact, all indicators are that carbon emissions will increase over the next decade or so. Why is this the case?

Current initiatives to take on climate change are thwarted by at least four factors. Firstly, there is a need to recognise that levels of consumption and the use of energy, also of fossil fuels, are still rising amongst the consumer class alone. Affluence leads to apathy. Therefore a voluntary simplification of lifestyle seems to fall outside the desire of

the consumer class. Secondly, the global human population is predicted to rise from the current 6.7 billion to approximately 9 billion in 2050. In 2008 alone 139 million babies were born while 57 million people died, increasing the population by 82 million. Thirdly, the rapid expansion of the economies of China and India can scarcely be halted. Fourthly, the hope and aspirations of the world's poor are understandably to attain the standard of living that they observe amongst the affluent.

Moreover, it is important to recognise that any reduction in global emissions, and subsequently in the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, is impeded by accumulated decisions of the past. Here one needs to mention scientific data indicating the complex cycles of carbon in the biosphere – which implies that carbon dioxide emitted currently will continue to have an impact for decades to come.

More significant, though, are decisions regarding town planning, architecture, power plants, roads, public transport and other forms of infrastructure. Such decisions necessarily have long-term implications. For example, the expansive suburban areas virtually demand from those in the consumer class to have private modes of transport to get to work, school and church. This requires a whole network of roads, while public transport is often not used. Houses can be better insulated but this is not always easy, given the ways in which they are designed. To build new houses or refurbish old ones will also have a significant environmental impact. Coal-fired power plants are expensive to build and cannot be replaced overnight.

Further examples can easily be multiplied. The point is that social engineering, that is, changes to social structures (not to mention the entire global economy!) are usually slow and cannot be effected overnight. There are limits to the pace with which societies can respond to a challenge such as climate change. This raises a moral challenge, namely to respond now to an imminent catastrophe that is already evident, but will become increasingly clear only in decades to come.

To grasp the extent of the problem, it is important to acknowledge that the necessary information on climate change is accessible on the basis of numerous scientific reports. Moreover, technological solutions to curb human-induced climate change are readily available. There has been no lack of appeals to take the necessary steps. The reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have received as much media coverage as one would hope for. It has now become clear that to overcome climate change will demand far more than what science and new

technologies may offer.

This poses another set of crucial questions: How would it be possible to muster sufficient political will from all over the world to address climate change? Such political will is only possible on the basis of voter support and social pressure. In forming the opinions and attitudes of voters a far more widespread reorientation in civil society will therefore be required. Here the role of civil institutions (including churches), role models and the media will be crucial. How, for example, can the media's support for economic growth on the basis of a bombardment of advertisements be re-orientated towards sustainable goals? How can consumer resistance against higher energy prices be handled? How can the consumerist habits, attitudes or aspirations of the world's 6.7 billion people be re-orientated?

The true complexity of this issue becomes apparent when one realises that even those of us who have developed an acute environmental awareness often find it difficult to translate such an awareness into appropriate forms of action. All too often environmental problems seem so daunting and overwhelming that it is difficult to know where to start. A lingering gap lies between knowing that we face serious ecological problems and acting on this knowledge through our personal, political and social choices. Many of us therefore do little more than trying to conscientise others about the gravity and the scope of the problem – though sermons, talks, publications, workshops and conferences. That somehow makes us feel that we have accomplished something, although our actual carbon footprint remains roughly what it was.

The underlying problem is not just a lack of information or planning. It is a liberal fallacy to assume that information and education is sufficient to prompt moral action. Likewise, even though South Africans are generally well-informed about HIV and Aids, such awareness seems to be insufficient to stop the rampant spread of HIV-infection. Christians know that they need to love their neighbours like themselves, but still find it difficult to do so. The problem is evidently not just a lack of knowledge.

This may help us to understand why human-induced climate change points in the direction not merely of an *economic* or *ecological* crisis but towards a deeper *cultural* and *spiritual* one. This problem has to be addressed through moral *formation* and not merely by providing more *information*. It is not simply a matter of agreeing with a memorandum spelling out some common values or listing desired actions either. Moral

formation typically takes place within faith communities. This implies that the ecological transformation of religious traditions is critical to the emergence of an ecological ethos.

We suggest that, at a deeper level, the problem may be one of *a lack of moral imagination, moral courage and moral leadership*. It is indeed a matter of moral vision. We need to envisage alternatives to the current global economic order that has caused climate change – alternatives that will be able to *generate* sufficient wealth, *distribute* such wealth more equitably and help to *redefine* our very understanding of what wealth entails. Such a vision needs to be attractive enough to motivate millions of people, to energise and mobilise action. Or to put it in other terms: The question is whether “a different world is indeed possible” – as the World Social Forum professes.

Several observers, including those from the secular sphere, have recognised the potential of the world’s religious traditions to offer the necessary inspiration, spiritual vision, ecological wisdom, ethical discernment, moral power and *hope* to sustain an ecological transformation. Religious traditions can offer the mystic motivation and enthusiasm for earthkeeping projects that no other secular or government initiatives can muster on such a wide scale. Religious traditions can provide what science cannot: they promise not only meaning, but also deliverance, healing, comprehensive well-being. Religions help to shape our attitudes toward nature in both conscious and sub-conscious ways. They provide basic interpretative stories of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. If moral imagination is required, regaining the role of religion in society may be crucial. Those forms of religion that have not become secularised in a technocratic society, for example from within the African context, may well lead the way.

Are the world’s religious traditions able to muster sufficient moral power and vision to turn the tide, to show a path out of the downward spiral of environmental degradation? Indeed, can religion really make a difference? It seems clear that this will require nothing less than a transformation of each tradition (preferably in terms of each own heritage and particularity). Given the complicity of Christianity in the crisis that we have to face globally, it should be clear that Christians will have to and may play a crucial role in coming to terms with the deepest roots of the crisis. We may engage with others to help find solutions, but we can only do so with integrity if we do not disassociate ourselves too eagerly from such complicity.

## **A lack of moral vision amongst Christians in South Africa?**

The struggle against apartheid in South Africa required clarity on an alternative vision for society. In order to replace a political dispensation based on racial segregation many of us worked towards a non-racist, non-sexist democracy in a unitary state. This political vision inspired us to resist apartheid policies. Christians offered their own interpretation of such a vision, typically based on notions of human dignity, justice and solidarity with those in need. Others portrayed this in terms of the Christian hope for the coming of God's reign, on earth as it is in heaven.

This raises the question whether Christians can uphold an alternative moral vision in a world threatened by climate change. We live in a time that lacks a compelling moral vision, even though most businesses and institutions continually talk about their vision and mission. It is deeply worrying that we as Christians, too, so often seem unable to portray through our witness and action the alternative that is required. This is strange because the Jewish-Christian tradition has such a cherished heritage in this regard.

In fact, many Christians have been supporting a vision that is currently proving to be destructive. We have placed our faith and trust in human ingenuity, scientific progress and technological innovation. We believe that knowledge and education (or suitable qualifications) will offer us, and especially our children a ticket to prosperity. We have followed the secular dreams of increasing prosperity and economic development. We have come to follow a lifestyle (or to hope to be able to adopt one) that is unsustainable and cannot be adopted by all others. We have been captured by the lure of what could now be described in terms of the ideologies of consumerism, hedonism or materialism. This means that the focus of our hopes, trust and enjoyment is to gather wealth, to be able to buy and consume whatever our hearts desire, and to pursue a life of pleasure.

Those Christians who have seen that present economic practices and the lifestyles of the consumer class are not sustainable have often become despondent. Some have grappled with a sense of fatalism and nihilism where there is little hope of embodying an alternative vision.

What we need is therefore a new vision, a new way of seeing. The key to the renewal of our minds, our hearts, our attitudes and our practices lies in perceptions. We need to see but not with our eyes only. We need to identify sharply what is at stake; we also need to see beneath the



surface in order to develop deeper insight; and we need to interpret the future with the necessary foresight. Such foresight should include the scenarios of scientists and policy makers but should also reach well beyond that. It should be based on the future that God envisages for the whole of creation.

However such a vision is difficult to obtain when we are blindfolded by our own immediate interests and by the structures of violence in which we are trapped by our collective sins. Here the Christian liturgy and proclamation based on the biblical roots of the Christian tradition will be crucial to open our eyes. Through Christian worship we may again learn to look at the world around us through God's eyes – with mercy and compassion.

### **The gospel is being compromised within the context of consumerism**

It is perhaps still understandable that we as Christians have been trapped by the lure of wealth. However, it is especially worrying that we are all too often interpreting and proclaiming the gospel accordingly. This leads to a form of cultural Christianity that fits snugly with the consumer society in which we find ourselves. Here we need to mention the following ways in which the gospel has been compromised in our midst:

- In a context where a wide variety of churches are available, we tend to consider churches to be places where our needs can be met. We Christians thus select a church that will cater for our needs, where we can find our preferred mode of worship and can associate with people with whom we feel at home. We tend to “go shopping” for a church where our felt needs will best be met and where we can “Pick & Pray” to our hearts content. Therefore churches are branded to suggest subtle differences in style – more or less in the same way that other products and services are marketed.
- Where religious affiliation becomes a matter of consumer choice, churches become vendors of religious services and goods. They seek to cater for the spiritual needs of their members and wonder what on earth could be wrong with such a calling. A commodity-orientated church stands in competition with other churches to deliver the best goods and to deliver those goods in a more digestible form than its competitors do. Religious service providers have current and potential customers and compete with other firms seeking to serve that market. Accordingly, the clergy are the sales representatives of the church; the gospel, church

doctrines and various ministries are its products and proclamation its marketing techniques.

- Churches that do, in fact, manage to attract a large attendance, complain that many worshippers are not members of that specific local church, that they only attend church when their needs are satisfied and that they are easily lured elsewhere. The pews may be filled but not with the same people from one week to the next. As a result the worship team needs to do its utmost to ensure religious brand loyalty and to market its own product. Those leaders of religious communities who are able to attract a significant market segment may even enjoy celebrity status.
- Preachers find themselves at logger heads with other local churches to attract a larger attendance for “their” worship services. Indeed, in a competitive market only the “fittest” churches will survive. The pastor has to become a manager, a marketer and a marketable asset for the congregation, one whose appointment can be financially justified. Likewise, congregations are viewed as economic institutions. This is the case whether they struggle to survive financially or not.
- All too often churches reflect management structures derived and adopted from the corporate world. On this basis local churches require a needs analysis, business plans and growth models adopted from corporate models. The business of the church should be under firm control of management (prompting uneasy questions about the guidance of Word and Spirit) and the objectives in the business plan should be measurable, even numerically so.
- The gospel has all too often been portrayed as a consumer product which has to be marketed. Accordingly, this product should be packaged in a way that would be attractive to religious consumers. Advertisers marketing their products have often adopted the evangelical fervour of Christian proclamation. Ironically and tragically, in a consumer culture the gospel may well be marketed by adopting strategies through which advertisements evangelise us with the “good news” – even the salvation! – that consuming a particular product would bring. Meeting people’s spiritual needs is thus reduced to just another form of therapy, another way of “satisfying the consumer”. In this sense churches cater for the ministerial needs of their members in the same way that other agencies are eager to identify and satisfy clients’ needs.
- The Christian faith itself is understood as a form of self-gratification rather than as service to God and within the community. Aspects of the Christian heritage that may be less attractive to consumers, such as

themes of divine judgement, justice, sin, discipleship, self-sacrifice, are often toned down. By contrast, aspects of the Christian tradition that could be attractive are emphasised through soft-selling techniques (for example divine affirmation, grace, fellowship, love). Indeed, an experience-based form of religion (spirituality) can be a very marketable commodity. The market for such religious products (including gospel music, books, DVDs and so forth) is quite sizable, also elsewhere in Africa. There seems to be a large market for cheap religious products, but only a small niche market where the costs of discipleship are high. As the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, God may well be sick and tired of religious ceremonies that are devoid of a concern for justice (1:11-17)!

- As a result, the ethos of all too many churches merely reflects a consumerist attitude. This constitutes yet another example where the church is tempted to bridge the gap between itself and the world by becoming more like the world – and losing its distinct message as a result.

### **The Christian faith itself is being distorted: Prophetic critique, idolatry and heresy**

In the context of apartheid some believed that the separation of people on the basis of race was the only way to ensure peace and prosperity. Accordingly, people were deemed to be so different that they cannot be reconciled with each other. The only way to protect one's own culture and way of living was to separate people from each other. Some thus *believed* in apartheid; they put their trust in it. To them it became a route towards *salvation*, for protecting their identity and safeguarding their social position and sense of “civilisation”.

In the context of consumerism Christians have to reflect anew on the dangers of idolatry. We have to ask ourselves whether we have not been worshipping Mammon instead of God. Of course, no one would do so explicitly, but then (as Luther once noted) the object in which we put our faith in fact becomes our God. Several surrogates for trust in God have emerged: political power, quality education, access to swift technology, the power of positive thinking, marketing and, perhaps above all, the Market.

The Market has assumed several divine characteristics. It is supposed to be benevolent, invisible and omnipresent, even omnipotent in order to produce wealth and distribute benefits, costs and obligations to all. We are called to trust that the Market will indeed deliver, even where these results are not yet obvious. This even poses a consumerist version of the

theodicy problem: Why does an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient (if invisible) Market fail to deliver well-being to everyone, if it is in principle benevolent? Why do bad things happen to poor people if the Market should ensure that resources are distributed more or less equitably? In the South African situation education is perhaps regarded as equally important. We believe and hope that better education will in the end make the difference – for our children and for the country as a whole. No one would doubt the importance of education and training. Nevertheless one has to ask what has happened to the Christian conviction that the Way of the cross is the route to salvation. Exactly how are these forms of trust related to each other?

In light of these observations it is now becoming clear that climate change concerns more than an ethical issue. It is also a matter where the content and the significance of the Christian faith are at stake. To see this clearly we may again draw from the decades of struggle against apartheid.

Apartheid entailed more than just an oppressive political system, an unjust way of organising society or a brutal security machinery to repress resistance. As noted above, for some it became *the gospel*, a way towards salvation. In this form it infiltrated the churches as well, even churches that expressed prophetic critique against the then political system. Even today local churches are more segregated on the basis of race than most other sectors of society. Although there are no longer rules in place to enforce that, the differences of race, class and culture continue to separate Christians from one another.

When injustices are perpetrated in society and where this is done by the government of the day, this calls for *prophetic critique*. When such injustices are propagated, defended, condoned or practised within the church, it requires more than prophetic critique. It requires brotherly and sisterly admonishing, self-reflection, penitence, *a call to conversion and restitution*. This the *church* struggle against apartheid also involved. When Christians begin to believe that their well-being can only be ensured on the basis of separating themselves from others such a notion would require, as we noted above, *a critique of idolatry*. Where such a surrogate gospel is not only preached but defended theologically and offered as an adequate reinterpretation of the Christian gospel and the Christian faith, it becomes *a matter of heresy*. Apartheid was declared a heresy not merely because of the injustices associated with it, but because it was defended theologically. By the 1980s it was not so much

defended through theological arguments but condoned (also by Christians) in the name of practical expediency and state security.

In the context of climate change we as South African Christians are again called to discern what is at stake. The gross economic inequalities and injustices, as well as the ecological destruction associated with the current global economic order, call for prophetic witness and resistance in order to express concerns over justice, peace and a sustainable society. In this sense prophetic theology needs to reach beyond the previous critique against apartheid. The issues around sustainability have helped us to recognise that the struggle against apartheid were sometimes all too easily watered down to the quest for material wealth for those who were previously disadvantaged and attaining access to the fruits of Western technologies, at least for a new elite. This recognition calls for a critique against idolatry as such, not only against domination and oppression.

Moreover, where the gospel itself is being compromised (within Christian churches) action beyond prophetic witness is required. Then it becomes a matter of Christian confession and of resistance against the heresies that continue to thrive also within our midst. In the past we have failed to see how the gospel is being compromised within a consumer culture in the ways we indicated above. The most overt way in which the consumer society is defended theologically is through the propagation of the prosperity gospel. However, as was the case with apartheid, it is also defended, condoned or practised in several other subtler ways. In the past we could see with clarity that any theological defence of the apartheid system amounted to heresy. *The very purpose of this document is to confront and expose new ways in which the Christian faith is being distorted in our midst.*

## **In search of an alternative vision of hope**

The Bible is filled to the brim with images of hope. One may consider the following images: the return from exile, the new Exodus, the reinstatement of God's law, the hope for a new Davidic ruler, the coming of the Messiah, God's just judgement over the evils of history, God's peace (*shalom*) on earth, a new Jerusalem, the resurrection of the dead and indeed a new heaven and a new earth. Such hope is not based on a sense of optimism or on signs of development or progress. It is a hope that emerges, despite present realities, on the basis of faith in the promises of

God. To paraphrase the words of the prophet Habakkuk (3:17-19): even though the fig tree may not blossom, even though there may be no grapes on the vine, even when the olive produce fails and there is no cattle in the kraal, I would nevertheless rejoice in the Lord, my strength. Such a hope can continue to inspire and sustain us, however serious the threat of climate change may become in the decades that lie ahead.

How is such hope relevant in a time when we are faced with the looming disaster constituted by climate change? In ecumenical discourse since the Nairobi assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975, especially three concepts have been employed to express an appropriate vision, namely justice, peace and a sustainable society. In each case this also indicates an appropriate social agenda for churches. These three concepts remain as relevant as ever before in the context of climate change. It is important to see how these apply to climate change, how they are radicalised due to climate change, what the deepest significance of these expressions of Christian hope entails, and how they are related.

### **a) Justice**

The ecumenical vision of justice is usually related to the economic inequalities and injustices that prevail in the current globalised (neo-liberal) economic order. This pertains to the production, distribution and consumption of goods. In numerous ecumenical documents such injustices are pointed out, while the processes and institutional structures that tend to aggravate such inequalities are subjected to prophetic critique. It is not necessary to repeat such prophetic critiques here. Such inequalities and injustices are at the very heart of current international debates on climate change. In short, such economic inequalities underlie the consumer culture of the affluent and the relentless consumerist desires of the consumer class, but also of the desires of the middle class and the poor.

The rising levels of consumption, together with the production processes necessary to meet consumer demand for such products, may be regarded at one level as the root cause of climate change. In a world where we are so acutely aware of such economic inequalities we seek to defend what we have or strive to gain as much as others may have. Climate change therefore simply cannot be taken on without coming to terms with the legacy of ecological debt and with the tendency towards increasing economic inequalities.

In addition, climate change will also aggravate current injustices. Some countries and some sectors of the population have a relatively high carbon footprint and therefore contribute far more to the problem. Some have done so for a century or more, while others have recently begun to add to global carbon emissions. As pointed out above, South Africa's position is ambiguous in this regard since our national carbon footprint is more than double the global average, despite our position as a so-called "developing" economy. Moreover, the stark and still increasing economic inequalities in South Africa tend to hide the discrepancies between the carbon footprint of the consumer class and that of the poor within our country. By stark contrast, it is well established in climate change discourse that the human victims of climate change will typically include those who have contributed least to the problem. This also applies to the African continent as a whole and to South Africa itself. This is an obvious case of gross injustice.

Christians are therefore right to regard this situation primarily as a matter of justice. Here we may draw on a rich tradition of prophetic critique in the biblical roots of Christianity. Sometimes we have domesticated these powerful memories but in times of crisis prophets have come along to unpack the transformative power of these stories.

In this regard Christians may find numerous allies from other faith traditions, in civil society and in other interest groups around climate change. In the context of such common witness we need to realise that the authenticity of our position on justice will be tested in years to come on our willingness to act in solidarity with the victims of climate change. We will have to answer new questions not only *about* our neighbours but also *from* our neighbours about the true meaning of neighbourly love.

As the World Council of Churches pointed out in a publication entitled *Solidarity with the victims of climate change* (2002), this will not be easy. As resources become scarcer, as conflict over such resources emerge and as countries defend their own interests, there is a distinct possibility that, under difficult circumstances, "love will grow cold" (Matt 24:12). In such a context we as Christians need to abide by our faith in God alone, in our hope and in our love for the other.

There is even more at stake: In the context of injustices we as Christians may hope for God's judgement over our situation, our lives and our culture. We may hope for God's just reign, on earth as it is in heaven. This is expressed in the Hebrew word *mishpat*. In Christian

communities in South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, divine judgement is often regarded as a source of fear and trepidation, not of hope or joy. In the context of climate change this is understandable. Our tacit acceptance of the legitimacy of prevailing economic inequalities, our consumerist lifestyles and aspirations and indeed our entire Industrialised civilisation will be confronted by God's judgement, not merely by shallow human judgements. We have to examine ourselves to discern what would survive God's judgement. However, for Christians divine judgement is actually a source of hope. The victims of history cry out for a just verdict in the face of inequalities, injustices, oppression and extermination. In the context of climate change such victims include numerous other species whose habitats have been devastated through urban expansion and commercial agriculture.

Moreover, the long-term scenarios portrayed in discourse on climate change provide ample illustrations that such judgement over our lives, our economies or our cultures, may become frighteningly realistic and vividly concrete. How may Christians discern the benevolent judgement of the triune God in such predictions? There is ample room for prophets of doom and destruction to proclaim a message of fear.

The challenge to Christians is to discern God's justice in such a way that it will elicit fresh hope – for the many victims of society and indeed for the perpetrators. That may certainly help us to revise our understanding of the basis, content and significance of Christian hope. We will have to learn anew what it means to trust in God alone. What we need perhaps most of all is a just verdict, a clear verdict that will liberate those that are currently victimised and that will offer a fresh beginning for all on that basis.

## **b) Peace**

The ecumenical vision for peace on earth should be understood in the face of various forms of violent conflict that continue to attract headlines in the media. It is important to list the full range of such conflicts – which include war between countries, acts of terrorism and war on terrorism, civil war, ethnic and religious conflict, political conflict (sometimes leading to civil war), organised crime and mob violence, gangsterism and street violence, domestic violence (including wife battering), rape and violence against vulnerable women and children.

It is widely recognised that the key to peace is *justice*. Without justice



there can be no lasting peace. In this sense justice has a certain priority over peace. Moreover, in order to sustain a lasting peace it is also important to ensure the participation of as many people as possible in decision making processes that may affect their lives. This is expressed in political views on democracy but also in an ecumenical discourse on a “participatory society” – as expressed in the motto of the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975. It should be noted, though, that other forms of life usually do not have a voice in such human decision making processes – even though their habitat and very survival may be dependent on it. As someone said in jest, if there were to be a parliament of all creatures where each would have one vote, its first decision may be to get rid of human beings given their threat to the survival of all others. The human species may be a species too dangerous to tolerate!

The vision expressed in Christian hope is not only for *peace* but also for *peace making*. This is far more complex. In the secular world this is understood in terms of categories such as mediation and conflict resolution. One may also refer to movements towards what Ghandi called *satthyagra*. This implies resistance against oppression through methods that show solidarity and compassion with the victims, but also honour the dignity of the oppressors and therefore refrain from violence.

In a Christian context there is a need to go beyond that, namely to explore what reconciliation in Jesus Christ entails. In human terms reconciliation is incredibly complex and includes aspects such as the accurate identification of the divisive issue at stake, the recognition of guilt, repentance, signs of remorse, confession of guilt, forgiveness, accepting forgiveness, embrace and appropriate forms of restitution. In light of ongoing discourse concerning the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is not necessary to explore these aspects here in any detail.

It is at least important to understand that doing injustice always includes an element that can never be undone. Although restitution is often possible and necessary, there will always remain a deficit that cannot be addressed by the perpetrator due to the flow of time. For example, one can express remorse over a word that offended someone so that the impact of such a word could be minimised, but once such a word has been uttered, it can never be retracted. In other cases, for example rape or murder, the deficit between the harm done and what can be restored through acts of punishment or restitution will be much

more significant. Such a deficit can be used as a weapon for revenge but can also be tolerated, condoned, forgotten or forgiven. This also implies that full justice, giving everyone exactly what is due to them, is never possible. In this sense, peace and reconciliation surpasses the quest for justice. In history, and in South Africa, there have been many examples of people (including parents, community leaders and martyrs) who have demonstrated a willingness towards reconciliation despite the injustices done to them. To forgive someone is to deem the continuation of that relationship to be more important than the harm that was done to oneself.

How is this relevant in a context of climate change? Here it is crucial to note that climate change is likely to aggravate numerous conflicts over scarce resources, especially water and oil. It should also be clear that this issue is likely to worsen the polarisation that already exist – between East and West, North and South, the Christian and the Muslim “worlds”, the consumer class and the poor, (over)-industrialised and so-called “developing” economies, urbanised Africa and rural Africa, gated communities and (environmental) refugees, previous and coming generations (ancestors and the unborn) as well as between the interests of humankind and otherkind.

One may therefore suggest that the threats posed by climate change can only be handled on the basis of some form of reconciliation which would facilitate cooperation between people from different continents, cultures and religions. That this is crucial should be evident from the observation that, wherever violent conflict erupts in the world, this tends to take precedence over any other social concerns. In the South African context we were scarcely able to address social concerns over housing, education, health and the HIV and Aids pandemic before the end of the apartheid era and the multiple conflicts that characterised that era.

What message of reconciliation could Christians then offer with regard to climate change? There can be no easy answer to this question. Firstly, those countries that have proportionally a high per capita emission of greenhouse gases are also countries where Christianity has historically been influential. Secondly, Christians with a large carbon footprint face other Christians with a smaller footprint across the table. While Christianity is associated with the affluent West, at least historically, in (South) Africa most church members are indeed poor and the likely victims of climate change. The problem is that such Christians, typically come to the table of international dialogue on climate change without having been reconciled with one another at the Lord’s table.

Such observations may leave one with the impression that Christian views on reconciliation have little to offer in the face of climate change. That may well be what non-Christian dialogue partners would suggest. In international negotiations on climate change talks about quotas for carbon emissions, carbon trading and carbon taxes may be more appropriate. Here forgiveness certainly cannot imply condoning the ways in which some contribute to the predicament at the expense of others.

Yet, the immense complexity of the problem may also help us as Christians to finally realise that this is a situation way beyond our own power. It helps us come to terms with the fact that we are caught in the trap of a web of guilt, in what may be called structural or systemic violence; that we cannot escape from the sins of the past; that our own good intentions remain deeply flawed and that the impact of our actions may in future prove to be highly ambiguous.

In this regard it may become appropriate for Christians, especially those of us with a large carbon footprint, to confess our indebtedness to the triune God and not only to our victims. We may reach a point where *we will also need God's forgiveness*. This is the point where we may discover that what we require is beyond our own initiatives but not beyond God's mercy. Here we need to realise the distinction between the church's ministry of reconciliation and what Christ has done once and for all outside of us and on our behalf, not only in us and through us (Romans 6:10). This is where we may recognise that we need not be burdened with doing God's work and understand that what holds the church community together is not common moral activity. This is where we need to acknowledge a fundamental asymmetry between divine and human action, an unbridgeable gulf between the work of Christ through which God reconciled the world to Godself (2 Cor 5:19) and our ministry of reconciliation.

The question is whether those of us with a large carbon footprint can indeed sincerely claim to be forgiven by God. Or is this perhaps the deeper reason why it seems so difficult to confess guilt in this case. Could it be that we sense we are not (yet) forgiven, not by ourselves, nor by others with a smaller carbon footprint, and perhaps not even by God? How can we continue with our consumerist lifestyles if we know what the long-term impact will be? Clearly, we cannot take it for granted that forgiveness by God will follow such a confession. We are not able to live from God's forgiveness, as was noted above. Therefore we anxiously and frantically seek to save the planet through our own efforts –

through practical innovations, activism or through conscientising others.

By contrast, those of us with a smaller carbon footprint find it difficult to relate to such a sense of guilt. We are angered by the injustices that are at stake. This is why any confession of guilt by those with a large carbon footprint can only be done with integrity on the basis of reconciliation with other Christians and in the presence of the victims. This includes victims from other countries and people from other faith traditions. It also indicates how difficult it is to speak (in this document) with multiple voices over a common challenge and a common witness.

### **c) A sustainable society**

In 1975 the World Council of Churches included the phrase “sustainable society” in describing its vision and social agenda in terms of a “Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society”. At that stage this was a new term indicating an emerging understanding of the notion of “limits to (economic) growth”. In 1983 at the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC this was rephrased in terms of “the integrity of creation”. Since then the concept of “sustainable development” came to be used throughout the world in order to recognise the need for “development” in some parts of the world, but also the need for such development to be sustainable. Since the meaning of such “development” is disputed, this led to ongoing debates on what “sustainable development” could mean.

In the context of climate change such reflections on issues of sustainability have become more urgent than ever before. It indicates that economic production and consumption simply cannot continue as usual. Why not?

- Firstly, we need to recognise the limited availability of some natural resources that provide us with energy. This is especially the case with oil, but also with natural gas, uranium and eventually also with coal. We will require alternative sources of energy sooner or later. It is unfair towards future generations to deplete such resources within the space of one or two centuries.
- Secondly, these resources are being depleted more rapidly than in the past due to a growing world population and rising levels of consumption per person, also amongst the consumer class.
- Thirdly, there is also an emerging recognition that *renewable* resources should be used in a sustainable way. This applies to the usage of land for agriculture, the fishing industry and the pillage of indigenous forests and

plantations. These renewable resources will no longer sustain human beings (and other animals) if we misuse those resources with the result that the ecosystems would eventually disintegrate. The concept of “carrying capacity” and “environmental footprint” is often employed to calculate the hectares of farmland needed per person to sustain a particular lifestyle in terms of the use of organic resources (for food, timber, paper, cotton, etc). Indications are that the carrying capacity of the land is already exceeded – which may have disastrous consequences. This may be likened to a lifeboat. It is always possible to add another person to it, but beyond a certain point (called the plimsoll line) the boat will become increasingly unstable in turbulent waters. Eventually, it will necessarily sink if more weight is added.

- Fourthly, there is a need to recognise that the earth’s biosphere has a limited ability to absorb the waste products of an industrialised economy. Here one may consider anything from aluminium cans to plastics to nuclear waste. Every product can be recycled through natural processes, but in the case of nuclear waste it would take thousands of years. Precisely here climate change is quite relevant because the underlying problem is the biosphere’s limited ability to absorb greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (an otherwise harmless substance). It can be recycled, for example through the natural process of photosynthesis, but humans are adding carbon dioxide quicker than it can be absorbed.
- Finally, there is also a need to recognise the limited ability of societies to change rapidly. In the case of natural disasters (flooding, fires, earthquakes) we are forced to make quick changes. However, social transformation is necessarily a slow process. The large ship of the global economy can change direction but not overnight. This is precisely the challenge, namely to shift the energy basis of the entire global economy from fossil fuels towards sustainable alternatives. This will require an immense process of restructuring. This has to take place within a period of approximately 40 years – of which the first decade will be critical. Nevertheless, the decision to begin changing direction can be taken in a much shorter period. The *kairos* moment when the global human community needs to decide upon that is this year (2009) – in light of the Conference of the Parties to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009. Only on the basis of such a definitive decision (with clear targets) can the necessary steps be outlined and implemented to change the direction.

What does this have to do with the Christian faith? Christians have always recognised God’s providence, nourishment and sustenance. This is a not merely a statement about the availability of resources. It is a

deeply Christian confession of faith in God who has remained faithful to God's own creation even though we as a human species have not remained faithful to God. For Christians, the symbol of God's faithfulness is the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. God cares for us even when we do not care much about God. God continues to provide in our needs despite the impact of a consumer society with expanding needs where there never seems to be enough wealth for everyone. We demand more even though God's grace is abundant.

In the context of climate change this faith in God's provision and sustenance is being tested. Will God remain faithful to Noah's children even when we engage in activities that threaten to destroy the ecosystems that sustain our lives? How long will God have patience with us? How long will God's mercy sustain us? Will we learn that God's mercy is sustained by God's justice? What about God's judgement over our lives, our ways and standards of living, our cultures and civilisations? Is God's judgement not also a way in which God's mercy is sustained? When will God begin to use the forces of chaos to destroy that which is no longer sustainable in order to start anew, to bring forth something that is creative, surprising and a source of wonder and amazement?

These questions may help us to see that the most important question in reflecting on sustainability is not *how* something can be sustained or *whether* it is sustainable, but *what* exactly is being sustained. Natural processes, the cycles of life and the thrust of evolutionary processes will continue with or without human interference. The real question is whether industrialised civilisations can continue along more or less the same lines for another century or so. As many have recognised, what is at stake is the very foundations of our notion(s) of civilisation.

Embedded in this are questions about the sustainability of many aspects of contemporary society that those of us in the consumer class have become so used to: suburban housing, the tourism industry, air travel, mega-sports events, educational institutions, structures of governance and economic systems. These aspects can be sustained, but only at grave costs and only when sacrifices are made elsewhere in order to make that possible. Some may need to travel more, but that is only sustainable if others travel less (if using fossil fuels). Some may want to have a carbon footprint above 2 tons per year, but then the footprint of others have to be less than that. *The real problem is that decisions over what should be sustained are not made by those who have to make the sacrifices.*

It should be abundantly clear that the sharp inequalities that characterise the global economy cannot be sustained indefinitely. Not only would it be impossible for the global poor to adopt the standard of living of the consumer class; in a world with scarce resources the societal tensions associated with such inequalities cannot be contained. It will put an unbearable strain on local, national and international social services – for poverty relief, humanitarian aid, the handling of millions of refugees, disaster management, health services and education facilities.

#### **d) How are these three visions related to one another?**

We need to recognise that these three aspects of an ecumenical vision are not always in harmony. In fact, it is quite evident that they are in tension with one another:

- Those of us who work towards nature conservation and wilderness preservation and who are concerned about environmental issues may be inclined to emphasise the integrity of creation above issues of justice and peace. We argue that we need to care for the earth in order for the earth to care for us. We insist that no economic activity will eventually be possible if it cannot be sustained in the long term.
- Those of us who are primarily concerned about economic inequalities and such injustices are afraid that global environmental concerns may shift the focus away from the plight of the poor and the destitute. We notice that those who are concerned about environmental issues and climate change all too often come from the consumer class. This may well be an appropriate form of “contextual theology” for the consumer class, but we tacitly feel that nature conservation is a luxury that those who have time and energy to attend to can worry about. It is far more urgent to attend to people’s immediate needs for food, shelter and medication currently than to worry about climate change decades from now. If life becomes a struggle for basic survival, as is often the case in Africa, it becomes increasingly difficult to resist environmental destruction. While the rich may see beauty and grace in the movement of an animal, the poor may regard it as a necessary source of food. At the same time, we recognise that it is the poor who suffer the consequences of environmental destruction and that they (we) will become the first victims of climate change.
- Those of us in decision-making bodies at a local, regional and national level recognise the potential for conflict over scarce resources. We also see how various interests play a role in different strategies proposed to

address climate change. We are deeply worried that such potential for conflict will require ever more urgent attention and that a failure to curb potential conflicts currently will make any collective efforts to address climate change (which would be the only way forward) impossible later. In times of violent conflict (such as war), handling such conflict takes precedence over anything else. Then it becomes a matter of survival on a daily basis so that long-term survival seems trivial.

The tensions between these agendas also indicate that the one cannot be given attention without the other. One further observation is important, namely on the use of “survival language”. This comes to the fore in each of the perspectives. Long-term survival is only possible on the basis of sustainability. The lives of many poor and destitute people in South Africa are indeed accurately depicted as a basic struggle for survival. Amidst violent conflict one’s survival and meeting one’s own immediate interests necessarily becomes the priority.

At the same time such “survival” language can easily be abused. Even those of us in the consumer class often slip into a “survival” mode. We do that by trying to protect what we have at all costs – amidst the real threats to life, property and employment security. We also struggle to cope with the demands of life and the tempo and competition of an industrialised urban society and often just try to “get through each day”.

In such a context it seems that we will need to learn anew how mercy and loyalty, justice and peace are intimately connected. In the words of Psalm 85:10-11 (NRSV):

Steadfast love [*hesed*, loyalty, solidarity] and faithfulness [*’emet*, truthfulness] will meet; righteousness [*tsedakah*, justice] and peace [*shalom*] will kiss each other.

Faithfulness will spring up from the ground and righteousness will look down from the sky.

The Lord will give what is good and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

## **A biblical analogy**

A biblical analogy may be appropriate here. There was a time during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah, when drastic reforms were seen as the only way to avert a looming catastrophe. This stimulated a return to the Torah, to an understanding of how God’s just and merciful laws have to be reinterpreted within the context of that time. That understanding created the environment for the emergence of the Second Law – the



book of Deuteronomy.

However, a few decades after that the prophet Jeremiah came to a point where he had to realise that a catastrophe could no longer be averted. The earlier messages of warning were not heeded. The crisis was imminent. In hindsight we know what that meant: that everything precious to him was lost. The dynasty of David came to an end. The temple was destroyed. The city of Jerusalem lay in ruins. Lament was the only appropriate response.

Yet, when the crisis was at its most severe point, Jeremiah maintained a different form of hope. This was not a hope that the crisis could be averted or that he would personally survive the looming catastrophe. Instead, he placed his hope in God alone. He bought a piece of land in a city that was to be destroyed. This signalled the hope that, after the day of judgement, God would remain faithful to God's people and to the land that was laid waste; the belief that God would once again create something new out of the ruins. Again, in hindsight we know that this actually did take place, but only three generations later, namely during the time of the return from exile. It is portrayed by Deutero and Trito Isaiah as a new exodus, indeed a new creation. Yet, this new beginning was less spectacular than these prophets had hoped for. They therefore cast their eyes into the distant future, hoping for the coming of the Servant of Yahweh, the Messiah who would bring healing to the land.

The biblical analogy of Josiah would be more appropriate for our times than that of Jeremiah. It is not yet too late. We know that we have only a decade or so to take on the challenge. This would require a decisive change of direction, in biblical terms a conversion (*metanoia*), a change of heart and mind, towards a sustainable economy as well as such a lifestyle.

Later, hopefully much later, we may come to a point where our only hope would be that life on earth will again flourish, even if that may mean the extinction of our species. Of course, this would not be something to rejoice in or to even contemplate as a source of hope from our point in history. Later, hopefully much later, Christians may, through the eyes of faith, come to see such judgement – on our generation's insane addiction to material wealth – in terms of God's loyalty to God's own beloved creation. This may help us to rest in God's work – which is done in us, through us and even without us – and to heal us from a frantic activism where we try to save the planet through our own efforts.

## In search of appropriate theological metaphors

In reflecting on the content of Christian hope (in terms of God's justice, peace and sustenance) there is also a need for metaphors and theological models to explain the significance of such hope for us today. These models may help to concretise such a vision. What is required in order to move in the direction of such a vision?

Several models are already widely used, each with some strengths, but also some limitations. Each has roots in the biblical traditions, but each also extends that tradition and may well distort it as well. For the sake of clarity and in order to find a way forward it may be helpful to identify some of these models:

- The key metaphor used in the Kairos Document of 1985 was that of *liberation*. This helped to portray God as the Liberator of those who are poor and oppressed. In the South African context of political oppression at that time it was a particularly influential metaphor. Some also recognised that there would be no liberation for the oppressed without the liberation of the oppressors. In the context of the economic injustices that characterise the neo-liberal economic order, "liberation" has lost nothing of its power. In the context of ecological degradation one may also speak of the liberation of the whole of God's creation – to show that other forms of life also need to be set free from human domination.
- In the African context after 1990 several theologians suggested the metaphor of *reconstruction*. This builds on the reconstruction in the post-exilic period in Israel and emphasises the need for African countries to accept responsibility for (re-)structuring their own societies. Even though the imbalances and injustices of the global economy still require some form of liberation, it is futile to blame all societal ills on domination from the outside. What we need is also a spirit of cooperation, wisdom, energy and dedication in order to ensure good governance in every sphere of society. In South Africa this was of course understood in terms of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Many would see such work as a sign of the coming of God's reign, on earth as it is in heaven.
- In the mid-1990's in South Africa many others explored the significance of truth and *reconciliation*, justice and restitution. Of course, this has to be understood in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work, the need to come to terms with the legacy of the past, the healing of memories, the task of nation building, land redistribution and many other aspects of restitution that are still required. The key

metaphor in this regard is probably reconciliation and the need for forgiveness in order to be liberated from the legacy of the apartheid past. It should be noted that the notion of reconciliation has been highly contested – as is for example evident from the ways in which it has been discussed in the Belhar Confession (1982/1986) and the Kairos Document (1985/1986). As argued above, given the polarisation around climate change issues, there is no hope to tackle the problem without cooperative efforts that will require some form of reconciliation, also amongst Christians. We still need to rediscover the meaning of our reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ and the ministry of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us.

- Around the turn of the century the reality of the HIV and Aids pandemic became increasingly evident and started to dominate all other social agendas in South Africa. Soon we started to explore the meaning of health, *healing* and regeneration. We reflected on a theology of life – but also of death. Such healing can easily be extended to consider the healing of memories, healing from demonic possession that is so important for many of us and the healing of the land. Ecological healing in the context of climate change would certainly include a stabilising of the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. For Christians such healing may be ascribed to the work of the Holy Spirit, but then on the basis of the healing that we find in Jesus Christ and his ministry.
- Over the last number of years many of us have become attracted to the notion of the “whole household of God”. *Oikos*-theology is based on the recognition that economic injustices and ecological destruction are deeply related. The power of this metaphor lies in its ability to integrate especially three core ecumenical themes on the basis of the Greek word “*oikos*” (household) – which forms the root of the quests for economic justice (the *nomoi* or regulations within the household), ecological sustainability (the *logoi* or underlying principles of the household) and ecumenical fellowship (*oikoumene* – participating as members of the entire household of God). One may therefore suggest that the household of God may serve as a metaphor to integrate a number of concerns, including the integrity of the biophysical foundations of this house (the earth’s biosphere); the economic management of the household’s affairs and the need for peace and reconciliation amidst ethnic, religious and domestic violence within this single household. This includes a concern for issues of health and education; the place of women and children within this household and an ecumenical sense of the unity not only of the church, but also of the whole of humankind and of all of God’s creation, namely the entire inhabited world (*oikoumene*). This raises

many further questions regarding the Architect and Owner of the house (God) and the place of the church within this larger household of God.

- Many other metaphors may of course be explored as well. Some may wish to consider the metaphor of responsible *stewardship* – often emphasised by those in positions of power. This metaphor has been widely criticised and has become somewhat sterile since it seems unable to elicit a vision of hope. Nevertheless there can be no doubt about the need to exercise a sense of responsibility, depending upon one’s sphere of influence in society.
- Others find an emphasis on *sanctification* fruitful. We need to see how the Holy Spirit calls us as individuals, Christian families and Christian families to embody and practise God’s will for our lives and our world. We are called to be the “light of the world” and “the salt of the earth”, a “holy people”. The church may in this way offer a visible sign of hope, an alternative community, in a world characterised by injustices, conflict and unsustainable habits.
- Another important metaphor is the notion of divine *wisdom*. This may draw on the Hebrew notion of wisdom portrayed as a woman, on the Greek understanding of *Sophia*, on the Christian recognition that Wisdom has been incarnated in Jesus Christ (the Logos), in the Spirit of Wisdom that will lead us to Truth, on parallels in the wisdom literature of other religious traditions and on indigenous knowledge in the African context. There is an obvious need for considerable wisdom in the decision-making processes in the context of climate change. Such wisdom is best understood when born from recognition of the limitations of human wisdom and a sense of wonder when contemplating God’s wisdom in creation and history.

It is not necessary to choose between these theological metaphors, although some theologians have argued for the priority of, for example, liberation, forgiveness or wisdom. In the context of climate change we will probably need a whole array of such appropriate metaphors to guide us in our decision-making in a particular instance. These metaphors can supplement and correct each other. There is also a need for theological reflection on how these models are related to each other. At least we may welcome more than one such a model in order to discern the challenges that have to be taken on in order to embody and practise such a vision of hope.

## **5. Responding to this vision (renewed acting)**

### **A moment of reflection on Christian action**

We now dare to reflect on an appropriate response to the challenges climate change pose to Christians in South Africa. In doing so we recognise a number of dangers:

- In acting anew we recognise that we have already been acting and that we stand to be judged before God, people of other faiths, citizens of other countries, future generations, other forms of life and especially the current and future victims of climate change, in our midst and further afield, because of inadequate actions taken.
- We also recognise that a failure to respond is also a form of disobedient response.
- We recognise that we cannot call upon others to respond appropriately with any integrity without the witness of our own paltry earthkeeping ministries.
- We need to remind ourselves of the danger that we simply repeat what others have said in terms of a checklist of do's and don'ts that people can attend to at home and at work. Although we should add our voices to such calls, Christians can and should do more.
- We acknowledge that the only adequate response would be one which would lead the world's human population collectively to stabilise the concentration in the earth's atmosphere within the space of four decades.

As Christians there is an added danger, namely that we can seek to respond to this enormous challenge through our own strength and efforts. We would thus seek to do God's work ourselves. This applies especially to those of us in the consumer class who have become secularised in our everyday lives, our habits and ways of thinking. Since we are no longer certain how to make sense of God's action in the world, the only option is to try, rather desperately, to save the planet ourselves.

Others amongst us may hope and pray for a miracle, for some divine intervention to reduce carbon from the atmosphere – but this may easily become a pious way of evading concrete responsibilities. Those of us who have kept a traditional African worldview alive may recognise visible and invisible, material and spiritual forces at work, but we struggle to explain this to scientists, politicians and activists working on climate change issues. Indeed, how would that make a difference?

Where can we discern the presence and transformative power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ?

Many of us have learnt to speak of the work of the church as God's mission (*missio Dei*), not ours, or the church's. God's mission of earth-keeping is not dependent on us: It and can take place with or without us, or even despite our efforts. At the same time, we believe that God does not prefer to work without the church of Jesus Christ in South Africa. This, too, may easily become pious talk. The temptation is to use God-language merely for decorative purposes. We pray for God's mercy and announce to the world that we put our trust and hope in God, without being able to make sense of what that actually entails. We therefore act as if we have to do what we can to save the planet ourselves. We fail to take our own message seriously. We reduce the gospel of God's work in Jesus Christ to save the world from sin and destruction to the feeble call upon Christians and others to "make a difference" themselves. This danger has been aptly referred to as one of self-secularisation.

This is tragic, precisely because the church in this way fails to make a contribution that few other role players can do. Moreover, this kind of contribution is sorely needed in current discourse on climate change. As observed above, the problem is not a lack of information, or conscientising, or available technology. There have been more than enough prophetic calls upon people to respond. The deeper problem is one of a lack of moral imagination, moral leadership and therefore of moral will. We know that we need to do something, but find ourselves unable to muster sufficient courage and moral energy to do what is required. We need an attractive moral vision that can inspire Christians and others to do what needs to be done. Clearly, to play on people's conscience, sense of guilt, fear, will-power, strength of character, positive thinking, obedience, dedication, or creativity will not be enough. Instead, we need to explore the rich vocabulary in the Christian tradition to offer a message that is so sorely needed to the world.

This, one may say, is a message of faith, hope and love – of trust in God's faithfulness to God's own creation, of faith in God's work in Jesus Christ through the power of God's Spirit, embedded in God's mercy for the victims of evolution and of human history and of hope in God's promises to make all things new.

To use the language of grace in the context of climate change is of course dangerous because it has so often been abused. It has become cheap whenever we grab for ourselves more and more of God's gifts,

more than what is sustainable, and understand that as God's blessing, as grace bestowed on us. Grace can so easily become an excuse to justify our consumerist lifestyles or aspirations. It can also become an excuse whenever we fail to carry out our responsibilities – in the hope that God would rectify what has gone wrong through our laxity. Yet, an awareness of God's abundant grace is perhaps the only message that can save the world, the only dynamo that can spur on Christian action. In this lies our last, most profound source of hope.

## **New commandments for an age of climate change**

In the Jewish-Christian tradition God's law is not regarded as onerous but as a source of wisdom, inspiration and joy. It provides a sense of direction, a rule for gratitude, that God's faithful may gratefully receive. It forms the way in which God's transforming grace becomes effective in the lives of believers and Christian communities. In describing a set of new commandments for an age of climate change we therefore wish to portray them as signs of grace, not as a burden or a threat.

*1. Worship in the context of the Christian liturgy provides Christians an opportunity to see the world through God's eyes – with mercy, compassion and justice, especially for the victims of history.*

Christian worship is sometimes criticised for being other-worldly. This is based on a misunderstanding. The orientation of worship is indeed on God alone. Here religion cannot be seen in purely functional terms as a handy instrument to be used for other purposes. However, it is precisely in seeing through God's eyes that we begin to comprehend something of God's vision for the world. This is based on God's mercy for sinners, for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised, the vulnerable, the meek, the dying, the extinct and the victims of history. This is expressed through the Way of Jesus Christ. Here "orientation" may be taken literally as a focus on the Orient, on Jerusalem, on Calvary. This is a strangely attractive vision that can transform the world.

The beauty of Christian worship – of singing, dancing, preaching, witnessing, being together, appreciating the visual arts, including liturgical decorations – can help to change the world. It may be true that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and therefore is contextual. Yet, it is also important to observe that an inspiring vision can only be based on something that is attractive, that can *attract* people beyond the temptation of more and more consumer goods. This is especially true in a world of

ecological destruction, where much beauty has already been irrevocably lost. It is also true in impoverished contexts. The poor amongst us do not only need bread (a hunger that can be satisfied); they also need beauty (a hunger that can never be satisfied). After all, the poor are not only poor; they are also people. They are not merely objects of charity.

In the context of climate change there are ample opportunities to rediscover the significance of the Christian liturgy. We have already mentioned the Season of Creation (the Sundays after 1 September), Environment Sunday (closest to 5 June) and a range of other festive days, but every worship service provides such an opportunity. It may come as a surprise for some, but this may well be the primary responsibility that Christians have in a context of climate change. This is not something to be deemed onerous but joyful and celebratory. The focus is not on what we need to do, but on what God has done for us. Nevertheless, the liturgy may unleash an energy that can transform society according to God's mercy. This energy is not derived from fossil fuels but from the power of compassion, epitomised by the cross of Jesus Christ.

Given this transformative potential of the Christian liturgy, it is deeply disturbing when the liturgy is merely geared to cater for the individual spiritual needs of church members along the pattern of other products and services which are marketed in the consumer culture. When people look for a place where their liturgical needs can be met, the focus is no longer on worshipping God or on seeing the world through God's eyes.

*2. The awareness of God's presence calls for celebration, for a break in our everyday activities, for times of rest. To keep the Sabbath may be exactly what the earth needs to restore itself.*

Climate activists rightly call upon others to act, to change the structures of society, the policies that are introduced as well as the dominant economic patterns. However, the enormity of the challenge may well leave everyone exhausted and despondent. The Jewish-Christian tradition has kept alive the practice of keeping the Sabbath, of celebrating periods of rest, which may be appropriate here. Resting is counter-intuitive as we tend to think about what we need to engage with. Yet, this may well be what is actually needed as the interruption of our ongoing economic activities will provide the earth's systems an opportunity to restore itself. The earth's biosphere can absorb the carbon that is emitted but only slowly and if given a chance to do so.

This has many implications. Firstly, a day of rest would help to slow the tempo of an industrialised society where people always find them-



selves too busy and left with too little time and energy to do what they deem necessary. To rest may sound inappropriate if one has too much to do. Some may argue that it would prompt laziness and laxity. However, the discipline of a day of rest interrupts one's activities enough to cause a rethink of priorities and agendas. Indeed, it may help to change the world! Secondly, many practices recommended by activists focus not on what we should do, but on what we (those of us in the consumer class) should *stop* doing. Examples would be using cars less, using less electricity, putting off the lights, etc. If we rest in these ways, the earth may be able to replenish itself. Thirdly, those involved in agriculture recognise the value of a year of rest, to let the land lie fallow so as to restore its fertility. Fourthly, the notion of a Year of Jubilee has inspired many people to call for a cancellation of the debt of poor countries. This is crucial in a context of climate change in order to address the economic inequalities that characterise the current global economy. Since this is to be celebrated only once in 50 years, it provides the victims of history an opportunity to start anew but also with the responsibility of taking care of their own needs for the next two generations.

*3. An experience of God's compassion and mercy may indeed alter the plight of the victims in our own midst. An experience of such compassion may also prompt us (where applicable) to recognise our guilt before God and the world and to confess our sins of greed, our consumerist aspirations, our idolatrous clinging to what money can buy and our trust in the powers that shape the world. We can only cleanse the world if we are cleansed by the waters of baptism.*

Confessing guilt is often seen as a burden. However, many of us have experienced it as liberating to confess one's guilt before God and before others. It frees one from the burden of pretending to be other than what one is, from hiding one's sins from others even though they can see that perfectly well. Any Christian confession of guilt has to be specific or otherwise it becomes generalised, vague and meaningless. As in the case of marriage conflict (for example where a husband infected his faithful wife with HIV), each person may have a confession to make, but the content of that confession would differ radically.

In the context of climate change those of us with a high carbon footprint have much to confess. The deeper problem is not an unwillingness to confess one's sins, but to see the implications of that for one's way of living. We simply cannot claim to be forgiven by God and continue with

our consumerist lifestyles. As a result, we cannot live from the joy of God's forgiveness, and therefore desperately try to save ourselves through our good works in the area of climate change.

Those of us with a smaller carbon footprint may have less to confess, although we cannot hide our consumerist aspirations either. We have a special responsibility: to find the courage to confess our sins of aspiration. This may shame those with a much larger carbon footprint and help them to recognise the impact of their lifestyles on others. However, such a confession by us with a smaller carbon footprint can so easily be abused by those who wish to maintain their lifestyle, and that is why such a confession would be truly courageous.

In a world where water, lakes and rivers have become heavily polluted and where drinking water is scarce and a source of intermittent conflict, we need, more than ever before, to be cleansed by the water of one baptism, for the forgiveness of sins. We can only cleanse the world if we are cleansed ourselves, if all of us, the consumer class and the poor go through one baptism. Can the healing power of the Holy Spirit also cleanse such chemically polluted waters?

*4. Christians are called to be witnesses of God's mercy; they are beggars who in bold humility may show others where they have found bread – enough bread for the whole world.*

As Christians we do not occupy the truth; at best we are witnesses to the truth. We do not possess the truth; at best we are possessed by the Truth. For Christians in conversation with people from other living faiths and with activists in civil society this may be difficult to acknowledge. However, like beggars who have found bread (comparable to witnesses to a sports victory), it is difficult not to tell others of the truth we have found. This is the joy and the responsibility of Christian preaching and teaching. In the context of climate change this is crucial. We need education and not only about the dangers of climate change. We need to understand who we are, where we come from, where we are going to and what we stand for. Only from a sense of Christian identity can we work with others to address the challenges that we face together.

*5. Christian families and communities would want to cultivate the virtue of gratitude for what God has provided us – not to justify what we have as “God's blessings”, but to counter the consumerist experience of lacking what we need, want or desire.*

In many Christian families and Christian communities there is the

habit of “saying grace” for the food that is served. That is true in the context of abundance and even more so in a context of scarcity and threat. The gratitude for what we have received is not to be taken for granted. In fact, Christian parents often struggle with the complaints of their children about what they do not wish to eat and what they would actually prefer to have. This is reinforced by consumerist desires and preferences and by a multitude of advertisements that suggest that ultimate happiness may be found through more consumer goods. This leads us to focus on what we lack, more than on what we have. The entire economy is built on this premise: how to produce and distribute wealth in the midst of scarcity. By contrast, an economy of gratitude focuses on the abundance that we have received, more than whatever we may lack. Indeed, to express gratitude for what we have received may well be the first step to check the way in which desires so often spiral out of control. Here the battle is often won or lost.

When things are received as gifts from God and used in service to God, they are enriched with gratitude. Contentment lies not in obtaining things you want, but in giving thanks for what you have. This is not dependant on how much you have. This is illustrated by a story about refugees in Mozambique who had “nothing but the tattered clothes they wore and a few pots for cooking” and who left their village in search of food while many villagers had already died. A World Vision group who met with the refugees reported: “... a group of women began dancing in a circle, singing and clapping, their faces beaming as they first moved in one direction, then the other. They repeated the same words over and over. I finally asked someone, ‘What are they singing?’ The man translated, ‘We have food. We have clothes. We have everything.’ These people, destitute beyond belief, were rich in gratitude.”

*6. Christian families and communities would want to cultivate the virtue of generosity in order to share in the abundance that they recognise they have.*

Gratitude for what one has received, energises generosity to address the needs of others. If God has given us his Son and if the Son has given his life so that we may live, this cannot but stimulate a sense of reciprocity, a sharing of what we have.

For those of us in the consumer class this is often very difficult to comprehend. We are trapped in the logic of consumerism which always emphasises what we lack and what we are prompted to obtain. On this basis we are daily reminded of our unfulfilled needs and we therefore

crave for more. We fail to experience the joy of generosity and sharing.

For those of us working amongst the poor sharing is sometimes (but not always) easier. We recognise another danger. So often the affluent regard the poor as objects of pity and charity. We wonder what we could give the poor that would make a difference. Often the poor are kept at a distance in this way. The affluent thus wish to give without any suggestion that they may receive something from the poor. This is generosity without humility and without respect for the dignity and humanity of the poor. And sometimes those of us who are poor regard the affluent only as sources from where we can receive something. And then we become dependant on such gifts. We become beggars who undermine our own dignity and the dignity of the person from whom we are begging.

The virtue of generosity only makes sense in a context of sharing where there is reciprocity. It may be worthier to give than to receive, but sometimes the opposite is true. To be willing to receive and to be served makes us vulnerable to the other. To receive a gift is to owe a reciprocal response. Those of us who are affluent find this hard to swallow because we do not expect to be recipients of the generosity of a poor person. Those of us who are poor know that we have much to give, if perhaps not in monetary terms.

The Christian practice of tithing may well become redemptive in the context of climate change. Offering the tithe has an effect that is similar to keeping the Sabbath. In order to give 10% of one's income (if necessary after tax) to God's work, people cannot be spending everything on themselves. To find 10% in an overextended family budget would imply that the family's entire lifestyle would have to change. One's monthly budget would need to revolve to a certain extent around the tithe. It then becomes impossible to merely expand one's own needs without seeing the needs of others. In this way we would give to God what belongs to God (which includes everything). However, tithing would not be redemptive if it emerges out of sense of duty. It can only follow from a spirit of generosity.

*7. Christian families and communities would want to cultivate the virtue of frugality.*

Amidst the consumer culture the virtue of frugality is often regarded as old-fashioned. Instead we are encouraged to spend in order to stimulate the economy. We need to do our duty as shoppers in order to encourage economic growth. In such a context the virtue of frugality is subversive, because this virtue counters the perception that humans are

insatiable creatures, ceaselessly craving for more consumer goods and seeking to maximise pleasure. It resists the temptations and pressures put on us through advertising.

Frugality implies thrift, moderation and contentment. It is not the same as simplicity, moral stricture or bigotry. That is illustrated by a famous story about Crates the Theban who cast all his goods into the sea because he thought that unless they were destroyed, they would destroy him. On this basis some people regard it as a virtue to permit themselves only bread and water. Instead, we may regard things such as food and clothes not merely as a matter of necessity; they are also a source of delight and of attraction.

Indeed, frugality may be associated with celebration and an affirmation of life – also amidst poverty, suffering, and degradation. Happiness, fun and games are not the prerogative of those who can afford it only. The festivities of the affluent will always be undermined by the surrounding suffering, starvation, and conflict. If your neighbours do not eat, you would not be able to sleep in peace. The celebration of life is not only prevalent amongst the affluent but also in many poorer communities that also engage in joyful celebrations, precisely in the midst of deprivation. Such celebrations call for a festive meal. In the midst of scarcity, food and drink are saved for the occasion. In celebration, human beings are able to transcend the scarcities and limitations of everyday life. Joy is the emotion which expresses the experience of overflowing abundance and the gratuity of life.

In the context of climate change such an appreciation for the virtue of frugality is crucial. There are numerous calls for practical steps that people can follow in order to lower their own carbon footprint (mitigation). We hear: “Switch your light bulbs,” “Put off the lights,” “Use solar heating for warm water,” “Buy a smaller car,” “Share a ride with others.” Such calls make good sense in the context of the consumer class. Every single thing that an individual may do would help. Churches with members in such contexts have to add their voice to such calls, but would want to emphasise the joy that frugality brings. However, if you have only three light bulbs in your shack, it makes little sense to reduce your use of electricity. If you do not even have access to electricity, such calls make even less sense. Nevertheless, the virtue of frugality is in such a context even more important. All too often those of us who are poor become indebted because we yield to our desires for what we cannot really afford.

*8. Christian communities would want to become, not only earthkeeping communities, but in themselves ecological communities.*

Above we referred to the movement to encourage local congregations to become eco-congregations. Although this movement is still in its infancy, this is the way forward. This does not only imply that some earthkeeping projects be launched within the community. It also implies that the community itself be transformed in order to become an ecological community.

Climate change provides an acid test for such a congregation. What is the carbon footprint of the congregation if its building, transport to worship services and other ministries, use of electricity, use of paper and parsonage are taken into account? Does the liturgy, witness and teaching in the congregation actually lead members to reduce their carbon footprint? Does this make a difference? Such questions are far more difficult to answer for congregations located in suburban areas than in poorer areas. Here, then, is an opportunity where those who, of necessity, have a lower carbon footprint can teach others how this may be done.

*9. Since one Christian community or group cannot change the world through any specific project, it may be appropriate to select a project that can serve as a symbol for the transformative power of the gospel.*

Numerous Christians have initiated earthkeeping projects in the context of congregations, Christian communities, families, youth groups and Christian organisations (see above). Although such projects remain far too few and far between, they do offer islands of hope, symbols of what can be done. Given the enormous scope of the challenge, the limitations of energy and the presence of so many other role players, it is perhaps wise for Christians to reflect on what they should do. This is necessarily relative to the local context. Perhaps Christians are called to do what no one else is doing.

We encourage Christian groups to identify the most serious challenge around climate change in their own immediate context. One may then pick one aspect of this challenge and seek to discern how the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit can transform this situation into a symbol of hope. What is needed is not necessarily something at a large scale where the complexity of the situation may thwart our best efforts. Instead, some small, meaningful and highly symbolic steps may be more appropriate. One example would be the strategy of “adopt-a-spot-nearby”. Here one would focus on a place / area that has become heavily degraded, deeply contaminated by sin. Visualise a street corner infested

by gangsters, prostitutes, drug dealers, rubbish and filth. How can that spot be transformed? How can Christians be used in such transformation? How can this exercise in visualising help us to address specific challenges around our own carbon footprint? How can this help us to challenge those in positions of power in various levels of government, various institutions and in the economic sector to alter their policies in the direction of more sustainable alternatives?

We are encouraged by what Christians in South Africa and elsewhere in the world have already done in this regard. Perhaps the initiatives of the World Council of Churches deserve special mentioning here. This reminds us also of the duty to network with others in order to change global policies. We need to add our voice to those groups lobbying for specific targets for mitigation and adaptation.

From a South African perspective we are conscious of those South Africa citizens and refugees from elsewhere who are already or will become victims of climate change. We will therefore need aid for adaptation in order to demonstrate solidarity with the many human victims of climate change, not forgetting the plight of other species. We recognise that financial sources for adaptation may not be readily available in a world where there is conflict over scarce resources. In situations wherever “love becomes lukewarm” we as Christians again have a special responsibility to demonstrate God’s mercy for the victims of history.

At the same time we are also aware that South Africa’s carbon emissions are unacceptably high and that, at least at a national level, we need to lobby for appropriate strategies for mitigation. Here, too, we need to identify those aspects of current policy that have to be confronted head-on. This need not be spelt out in the context of this document.

*10. Celebrating the holy communion, consuming the bread and wine in communion with others, perhaps provides the acid test for our commitment to address climate change. It also serves as the source of our energy to do so.*

The challenges of climate change cannot be addressed without coming to terms with consumerism. However, it should also be noted that the Christian gospel does emphasise that which is material, bodily and earthly. There can be nothing wrong with owning money, with purchasing goods and with consuming products. We have to eat in order to live and we may enjoy that. After all, Jesus was called a glutton and a drunkard because of his parties with the outcasts in terms of Jewish law. It would not help to end up with misplaced feelings of guilt whenever

we consume anything. It would also not help merely to call for moderation since this will always carry the connotations of gingerly denying the good gifts that God has provided and the pleasure that Godself found in creation. Such a message will evidently not be persuasive, given the many attractions of a consumer society. It will help even less to seek to surpass such attractions by portraying the Christian faith, the gospel and the church as the highest form of happiness, satisfaction and pleasure.

It is within the context of the Christian liturgy that Christians may learn what consumption means. The bread and the wine of the Holy Communion only make sense where one eats the bread with joy and when one drinks the wine with a merry heart – in relative abundance even when this takes place within the context of imminent threats. Jesus celebrated a meal with his friends even though he fully expected to die the next day. This can come to fruition where the Word of God is opened at the table and shared with one another, where the dangerous memory of Jesus is kept alive.

This is especially meaningful when rich and poor, employers and employees, madams and their domestic servants, come together at the same table in order to share their bread, their life stories and their joys and sorrows with each other. On this basis Christians may learn to embody the virtues of hospitality, generosity and mutual care. This necessarily implies a sense of reciprocity – of learning how to give but also how to receive in a way that does not undermine equal worth.

It would be even more meaningful if this takes place on the basis of a recognition of the sources of the bread and the wine. Where was it produced? At what cost to other species? By whose labour? Could such economic practices be regarded as sustainable and fair? How was it marketed, distributed, sold and purchased? In this way the Holy Communion may teach Christians how to consume all other products and to live in a sustainable way, with one another, on earth, and before God.

## **6. Doxology**

An African Regional Consultation on Environment and Sustainability was held at Machakos, Kenya, from 6 to 10 May 2002, in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg later that year. This consultation produced a statement that offers a fitting doxology for Christians in South Africa addressing the challenges of climate change.



## The Earth Belongs to God

“The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.” (Psalm 24:1-5)

*In the household of God (oikos) the management of the house (economy) has to be based on the logic of the house (ecology).*

1. *In Africa today, it does not appear as if the earth belongs to God. Instead, it belongs to:*

- Governors who control the earth's resources often for their own benefit;
- Business and industry, Trans-National Corporations (TNC's), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), the forces of globalization that control the global economy in their own interest;
- Developers whose development projects do not benefit local communities;
- The affluent 20% of the world's population who own 80% of the world's resources;
- Industrialists whose factories pollute the environment at the expense of the poor;
- Men;
- Foreign investors who are more interested in profits on their investments than in poverty eradication and in the impact of debt on poor countries;
- The affluent and not the meek who will inherit the earth (Mt. 5:3-5).

2. *God has entrusted the land and all its natural resources to all people to care for, keep and use it within communities. This requires a vision of sustainable communities in which there will be:*

- A just sharing of the earth's resources;
- A working together in community;
- Participation of all in decision-making processes;
- The right to contribute to and sustain the common good;

- Cherishing of indigenous knowledge systems that are inclusive, participatory and consultative;
- A recognition and utilization of people's indigenous knowledge and skills;
- Putting in place structures and mechanisms that will ensure the provision of a community's daily needs;
- Responsible leadership and self-reliant citizenry;
- Public institutions that address people's legitimate needs;
- Engendering a harmonious co-existence between all stakeholders;
- Respect for all forms of life.

3. *The land given to us by God does not only belong to the present community.*

- It also belongs to our ancestors on whose contributions we build and whose memories we keep.
- It also belongs to the coming generations for whom we hold the land in trust and whose needs we should not compromise.

4. *The land does not belong to us as people. Instead, we belong to the land.*

- We came from the earth and to the earth we will return.
- We are not living on the earth; we are part of the earth's biosphere.
- We form part of the land and we live from the earth for the flourishing of the earth.
- The well-being of the earth transcends all of us because it is something bigger than our own interests.

5. *The land does not belong to itself. Ultimately, it belongs to its Creator, the One who sustains the Earth, and who will finally restore it. In the light of these considerations we are challenged to respond in the following ways:*

- We CONFESS that we as human beings have not always allowed the earth and its creatures to flourish. We have all too often abused and brought death to the land. We confess that we, especially as churches, have often been indifferent to environmental degradation and that, as a result, we have participated in the destruction of the environment. In many ways, we are doing to the land what AIDS is doing to our bodies. Now the land itself is infected with AIDS.

- We ACKNOWLEDGE our responsibility, especially as churches, to keep the land and to care for it as the land cares for us.
- We COMMIT ourselves, especially as churches, to promote relationships that enhance and do not undermine sustainable communities. Therefore, we commit ourselves:
  - To promote the harvesting of water, especially in small community projects in arid or semi-arid areas;
  - To help ensure food security for all, especially through indigenous means of food production, and to avoid dependence on external means of agricultural production;
  - To promote practices that enhance the fertility of the soil;
  - To resist all forms of deforestation and to promote tree-planting;
  - To speak out against industrial pollution caused elsewhere in the light of its impact on geographical areas such as the African continent and the Island States that are particularly vulnerable to climate change;
  - To seek appropriate forms of waste management and to resist the disposal of toxic and other forms of waste in impoverished countries;
  - To promote the use of new and renewable sources of energy;
  - To promote technologies that add to natural resources and that do not only extract from nature. Where technologies do extract from nature, ways of replenishing such resources must be sought.
  - To promote participatory and inclusive forms of governance;
  - To promote gender justice in the light of the crucial role of women in ensuring sustainability;
  - To attend to the re-education and re-orientation of local communities.
- We CALL upon leaders of Christian churches, of other faith communities and various levels of government, in African countries and elsewhere in the world:
  - To promote the well-being of the land and all its creatures
  - To resist the greed and self-interest of affluent and powerful minorities.
- We PRAY for the healing of the land.

God, help us not to destroy the land and to stop fighting over resources that ultimately belong to you. God graciously hear us. AMEN.

## **Addendum A: Endorsements**

The South African Council of Churches and the committee responsible for drafting this document hereby invite other South African church structures (at various levels ranging from Bible study groups to diocese, synods or ecumenical organisations) as well as individual Christian leaders to endorse this document. To have endorsed this not only implies that this document is regarded as an appropriate statement to churches in South Africa on the challenges related to climate change. It also indicates an acceptance of the responsibility to help disseminate the document and the themes that are addressed within a particular sphere of influence.

Such endorsements may be forwarded to the secretary of the Climate Change Committee, of the SACC (Western Cape) at the following address: [deon.snyman@telkomsa.net](mailto:deon.snyman@telkomsa.net).

A list of endorsements will be appended to the electronic version of the document and made available by 1 December 2009. The following format will be used:

A) The South African church structures (at various levels) that are listed below have endorsed this document by 1 December 2009.

1. Name of church structure, denominational or ecumenical context (if applicable), town (if applicable)
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

B) The following Christian leaders, involved in ministries at various levels in South Africa, have endorsed this document by 1 December 2009.

1. Name and surname of individual, church affiliation, town/city
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Other church structures, Christian communities and individual Christian leaders are invited to endorse the document also after 1 December 2009

and to demonstrate a commitment to address the challenges posed by climate change in this way.

It is also hoped that many others will help to develop the wide range of resources required to do so. These resources include hymns, prayers, posters, lyrics, poetry, DVD's, colour-in books, T-shirts, bite-size chunks for reflection in internet chat-rooms, and, especially, stories about what Christians have done concretely – with all the failures and successes that it may entail.

## **Addendum B: Resolution on climate change adopted by the 2007 triennial national conference of the South African Council of Churches**

Whereas:

We who worship a creator God believe God has charged us to care for, look after and nurture creation, to “keep it” (Genesis 2:15) for future generations.

We therefore believe that ensuring a sustainable future for our children is a primary responsibility.

We recognize that climate change and environmental degradation is a critical threat to sustainability.

We believe that in order to ensure sustainability, we must establish justice for all.

We therefore:

1. Call upon government to:

- a) Introduce regulatory legislation that will sufficiently reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to ensure that global warming remains below a 2o C rise;
- b) End all subsidies to fossil fuel and nuclear energy generation;
- c) Subsidize and promote at all levels – community, city, provincial and national – the development and building of renewable energy generation, achieving at least 15% by 2015; and

2. Urge our churches to:

- a) Lobby for the above changes; and
- b) Develop and disseminate resource materials and support training which encourages energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy and raises awareness about climate change.

We make this call in our response to God and for the sake of future generations who should not be disadvantaged by our irresponsibility.

## **Addendum C: Declaration of the Fellowship of Christian Council in Southern Africa (FOCCISA) on ecological debt and climate change**

WE, members of FOCCISA, from National Church Councils (NCCs) in Southern Africa, met in Maputo, Mozambique from 27 – 29 July 2009, under the auspices of the Economic Justice Network to reflect the engagement and the role of the Church on Ecological Debt and Climate Change;

**Carrying** the biblical responsibility to care for, nurture and creation, (Genesis 1:28 and 2:15, Romans 8:20-23) and conscious of the mandate to collectively work towards resolving the economic and ecological challenges confronting our people in the region;

**Affirming** the assertion that the church has a moral and theological responsibility to embrace its role of stewardship to lead in caring for creation;

**Acknowledging** our gratitude to God, whose providential care is immanent in creation and the renewal of all species, and cognisant that the voice of the Church carries with it moral authority;

**Aware** that the Earth, and all its inhabitants, human and non-human, are facing an unprecedented ecological crisis brought about by climate change, which has already brought mass suffering and loss of livelihoods for the vulnerable, particularly in Africa;

**Acknowledge and agree** on the concept of ecological debt which has been defined as: "... the accumulated, historical and current debt, which industrialized Northern countries – their institutions and corporations – owe to the countries of South for having plundered and used their natural resources, exploited and impoverished their peoples, and systematically destroyed devastated and contaminated their natural heritage and source of sustenance [...] Industrialised countries are also responsible for the gradual destruction of the planet as a result of their patterns of production and consumption, and environmental pollution that generates greenhouse effects."<sup>1</sup>

**Deeply** concerned that our world and particularly Africa's

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<sup>1</sup> In: *Ecological debt: The people of the South are the Creditors* edited by Athena K. Peralta, World Council of Churches 2008

sustainable development efforts and the Millennium Development Goals are under threat from over consumption and unsustainable, selfish use of its resources resulting in green house gas emissions mainly from burning fossil fuels;

**Further concerned** that the church has been complicit in this history through its own consumption patterns and lack of guidance;

**Recognizing** that a timely and bold intervention by the churches as part of the civil society can assist to mitigate this precipitous disaster;

**Noting** that there has been a lot of rhetoric within the political leadership rather than action to address the ecological and climate crisis;

Therefore, we declare as follows:

A. On the current international dialogue on the suitable post 2012 International Climate Change Treaty:

We call on the political leadership in Africa and globally to demonstrate moral responsibility and commitment to their peoples by;

- **Strong** political will to push for the recognition that industrialised countries have the primary historical responsibility to pay their carbon debt and adaptation to developing countries;
- **Warranting** that agreements reached are binding, ratified and implemented so that the global community can drastically reduce greenhouse gases to keep climate change below 2 degrees Celsius and distribute the burden in an equitable way in accordance with the principles of common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities;
- **Ensuring** that African negotiation teams are inclusive, well supported and resourced, both financially and in terms of expertise;
- **Ensuring** that accessing Global Environmental Funds/LDC funding processes for climate change adaptation through the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) are transparent, democratic, participatory and simplified.

We call on African governments to:

- **Ensure** that climate change issues are integrated in all national sustainable development agenda in a transparent and inclusive manner;
- **Allow** the free flow of information so that the true nature of the damage to our ecologies and environments is in the public domain for all



concerned to see and take action on;

- **Prioritize** funding to climate change activities through the national budget.

#### B. On Ecological Debt and Extractive Industries

We call on African governments to:

- **Stop** the exploitation of Africa's resources through extractive industries;
- **Halt** their involvement in actions and enterprises and policies that are to the detriment of our peoples and lands, and for which little or no gains are made or are discernable;
- **Ensure** that regulations are in place that make environmental plunder costly by increasing penalties for environmental and human rights damage. In addition, our governments must ensure that institutional mechanisms exist to ensure close monitoring and enforcement;
- **Set up** effective multi-stakeholder bodies to undertake comprehensive assessments of both historical and contemporary Ecological debts of each country, demand recognition, apportion responsibilities and develop fair restitutions mechanisms for affected communities where required;
- **Use** their membership in the African Union (AU) and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to set up advisory and monitoring mechanisms so as to ensure that all Member States are informed on models and practises with respect to natural resource extraction regulatory regimes.

#### C. We, therefore commit ourselves to:

- Continue awareness-building and theological reflections among member churches and congregations on ecological debt and climate justice;
- Engage with our governments and build partnership with relevant stakeholders within the current climate change negotiations to ensure a fair, equitable and ecologically just deal in Copenhagen;
- Admitting that we have failed in our responsibility and that creation is rapidly being destroyed, we seriously assess our own practises and contribution to climate change and to environmental damages and promote among our institutions and our countries, strong advocacy, leadership and actions in favour of climate, ecological and economic justice.

/Ends.

## **Addendum D: WCC Statement on eco-justice and ecological debt**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee adopted the following statement on Wednesday, 2 September 2009:

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”  
(Matthew 6:12)

1. The era of “unlimited consumption” has reached its limits. The era of unlimited profit and compensation for the few must also come to an end. Based on a series of ecumenical consultations and incorporating the perspectives of many churches, this statement proposes the recognition and application of a concept that expresses a deep moral obligation to promote ecological justice by addressing our debts to peoples most affected by ecological destruction and to the earth itself. It begins with expressing gratitude to God, whose providential care is manifested in all God’s creation and the renewal of the earth for all species. Ecological debt includes hard economic calculations as well as incalculable biblical, spiritual, cultural and social dimensions of indebtedness.
2. The earth and all of its inhabitants are currently facing an unprecedented ecological crisis, bringing us to the brink of mass suffering and destruction for many. The crisis is human-induced, caused especially by the agro-industrial-economic complex and culture of the global North, which is characterized by the consumerist lifestyles of the elites of the developed and developing worlds and the view that development is commensurate with exploitation of the earth’s “natural resources”. What is being labeled and co-modified, as “natural resources” is all of creation – a sacred reality that ought not to be co-modified. Yet the Northern agro-industrial-economic complex, especially in the current era of market globalization, has used human labour and resourcefulness, as well as the properties of other life forms, to produce wealth and comfort for a few at the expense of the survival of others and their dignity.
3. Churches have been complicit in this history through their own consumption patterns and through perpetuating a theology of human rule over the earth. The Christian perspective that has valued humanity over the rest of creation has served to justify the exploitation of parts of the earth community. Yet, human existence is utterly dependant on a healthy functioning earth system. Humanity cannot manage creation.

Humanity can only manage their own behaviour to keep it within the bounds of earth's sustenance. Both the human population and the human economy cannot grow much more without irreversibly endangering the survival of other life forms. Such a radical view calls for a theology of humility and a commitment on the part of the churches to learn from environmental ethics and faith traditions that have a deeper sense of an inclusive community.

4. The churches' strength lies in its prophetic witness to proclaim God's love for the whole world and to denounce the philosophy of domination that threatens the manifestation of God's love. The biblical prophets had long ago deduced the intrinsic connection between ecological crises and socio-economic injustice, railing against the elites of their day for the exploitation of peoples and the destruction of ecosystems (Jeremiah 14: 2-7, Isaiah 23: 1-24 and Revelations 22). Based on Jesus' commandment of love, as expressed in his life and parables, the World Council of Churches (WCC) must broaden its understanding of justice and the boundaries of who our neighbours are. For many years, the WCC has called for the cancellation of illegitimate external financial debts claimed from countries of the South based on the biblical notion of jubilee (Leviticus 23). It has taken a step further in addressing the ecological dimension of economic relationships.

5. Beginning with the articulation of the ideas of "limits to growth" in a Church and Society consultation held in Bucharest in 1974 and "sustainable societies" at the 1975 Nairobi assembly, the WCC has been working deeply on ecological justice for over three decades. At the 1998 Harare assembly, the harmful impacts of globalization on people and the environment came to the fore through the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and earth (AGAPE) process, leading to the ongoing study process on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology. As an offshoot of these important ecumenical reflections and actions, the WCC, in partnership with churches and civil society organizations in Southern Africa, India, Ecuador, Canada and Sweden, initiated work on ecological debt in 2002.

6. Ecological debt refers to damage caused over time to ecosystems, places and peoples through production and consumption patterns; and the exploitation of ecosystems at the expense of the equitable rights of other countries, communities or individuals. It is primarily the debt owed by industrialized countries in the North to countries of the South on account of historical and current resource plundering, environmental degradation and the disproportionate appropriation of ecological space

to dump greenhouse gases (GHGs) and toxic wastes. It is also the debt owed by economically and politically powerful national elites to marginalized citizens; the debt owed by current generations of humanity to future generations; and, on a more cosmic scale, the debt owed by humankind to other life forms and the planet. It includes social damages such as the disintegration of indigenous and other communities.

7. Grounded on an overriding priority for the impoverished and a deep moral responsibility to rectify injustices, ecological debt lenses reveal that it is the global South who is the principal ecological creditor while the global North is the principal ecological debtor. The ecological debt of the global North arises from various causal mechanisms whose impact has been intensified in the current economic crisis.

8. Under the current international financial architecture, countries of the South are pressured through conditions for loans as well as multilateral and bilateral trade and investment agreements to pursue export-oriented and resource-intensive growth strategies. Ultimately it fails to account for the costs of erosion of ecosystems and increasing pollution. Many mega-development projects (e.g. dams) in countries of the South are financed through foreign lending by international financial institutions in collaboration with undemocratic and corrupt local leaders and elites, without the informed consent of local inhabitants and with little consideration of the projects' ecological and social consequences. Moreover, industrialized Northern countries make disproportionate use of ecological space without adequate compensation, reparation or restitution. Northern countries' ecological footprint (an approximate measurement of human impacts on the environment) presently averages 6.4 ha/person. This is more than six times heavier than the footprint of Southern countries at an average of 0.8 ha/person.

9. Human-induced climate change heightens the relationship of North-South inequity even further. Industrialized countries are mainly responsible for GHG emissions causing climate change (though emerging economies in the South are becoming major contributors to global GHG emissions in absolute terms). Yet, research indicates that the South will bear a bigger burden of the adverse effects of climate change including the displacement of people living in low-lying coastal areas and small island states; the loss of sources of livelihood, food insecurity, reduced access to water and forced migration.

10. In the light of Biblical teaching (cf. Matthew 6,12), we pray for repentance and forgiveness, but we also call for the recognition,

repayment and restitution of ecological debt in various ways, including non-market ways of compensation and reparation, that go beyond the market's limited ability to measure and distribute.

11. The central committee of the WCC recognizes the need for a drastic transformation at all levels in life and society in order to end the ecological indebtedness and restoring right relationships between peoples and between people and the earth. This warrants a re-ordering of economic paradigms from consumerist, exploitive models to models that are respectful of localized economies, indigenous cultures and spiritualities, the earth's reproductive limits, as well as the right of other life forms to blossom. And this begins with the recognition of ecological debt.

While affirming the role of churches to play a critical role in lifting up alternative practices, as well as building the necessary political will and moral courage to effect urgent transformations, the central committee of the WCC meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009:

A. ***Calls*** upon WCC member churches to urge Northern governments, institutions and corporations to take initiatives to drastically reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions within and beyond the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which stipulates the principles of historical responsibility and “common, but differentiated responsibilities” (CDR), according to the fixed timelines set out by the UNFCCC report of 2007.

B. ***Urges*** WCC member churches to call their governments to adopt a fair and binding deal, in order to bring the CO<sub>2</sub> levels down to less than 350 parts per million (ppm), at the Conference of Parties (COP 15) of the UNFCCC in Copenhagen in December 2009, based on climate justice principles, which include effective support to vulnerable communities to adapt to the consequences of climate change through adaptation funds and technology transfer.

C. ***Calls*** upon the international community to ensure the transfer of financial resources to countries of the South to keep petroleum in the ground in fragile environments and preserve other natural resources as well as to pay for the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation based on tools such as the Greenhouse Development Rights (GDR) Framework.

D. ***Demands*** the cancellation of the illegitimate financial debts of Southern countries, most urgently for the poorest nations, as part of

social and ecological compensations, not as official development assistance.

E. **Recommends** that WCC member churches learn from the leadership of Indigenous Peoples, women, peasant and forest communities who point to alternative ways of thinking and living within creation, especially as these societies often emphasize the value of relationships, of caring and sharing, as well as practice traditional, ecologically respectful forms of production and consumption.

F. **Encourages** and supports WCC member churches in their advocacy campaigns around ecological debt and climate change, mindful of the unity of God's creation and of the need for collaborative working between Southern and Northern nations. Specifically **supports** the activities of churches in countries that are suffering from climate change.

G. **Calls** for continued awareness-building and theological reflection among congregations and seminary students on a new cosmological vision of life, eco-justice and ecological debt through study and action, deeper ecumenical and inter-faith formation, and through the production and dissemination of relevant theological and biblical study materials.

H. **Urges** WCC member churches and church institutions to conduct ecological debt audits in partnership with civil society, including self-assessment of their own consumption patterns. Specifically, the WCC should establish a mechanism to provide for recompense of ecological debt incurred by its gatherings, and to collect positive examples of ecological debt recognition, prevention, mitigation, compensation, reparation and restitution in partnership with civil society groups and movements.

I. **Calls** for deepening dialogue on ecological debt and the building of alliances with ecumenical, religious, economic and political actors and between the churches in Southern and Northern countries.

J. **Stresses** the importance of accompanying ongoing struggles and strategically linking and supporting the efforts of peasant, women's, youth and indigenous peoples' movements through the World Social Forum and other avenues to design alternative compensation proposals, as well as to avoid amassing more ecological debt.

K. **Calls** upon WCC member churches through their advocacy work to encourage their governments to work for the recognition of the claims of ecological debt, including the cancellation of illegitimate financial debts.

L. **Calls** upon WCC member churches to deepen their campaigns on

climate change by including climate debt and advocating for its repayment by applying the ecological debt framework.

M. *Calls* upon WCC member churches to advocate for corporate social accountability within international and national legal frameworks and to challenge corporations and international financial institutions to include environmental liabilities in their accounts and to take responsibility for the policies that have caused ecological destruction.

N. *Calls* upon WCC member churches to support community-based sustainable economic initiatives, such as producer cooperatives, community land trusts and bio-regional food distributions.

O. *Encourages* churches all over the world to continue praying for the whole of creation as we commemorate on 1 September this year the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the encyclical of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, establishing the day of the protection of the environment, God's creation.

## **Addendum E: The term “consumer class”**

The term “consumer class” may be used to describe levels of consumption of particular households. Following an analysis by the Worldwatch Institute, one may identify three distinct classes in terms of levels of consumption: 1) the poorest fifth of the world’s human population who live in abject poverty and who would need to raise their levels of consumption for the sake of human dignity; 2) the middle class (more than 50% of the world’s population) who have access to shelter and clean drinking water, who enjoy a calorie adequate but low animal fat diet, who are largely reliant on public transport and who live in modest homes with electricity but with few luxuries (with an annual income of between \$700 and \$7500 per member of the household); and 3) the consumer class.

Although income does not correlate with consumption, it remains the easiest way to identify and categorise the consumer class. The Worldwatch Institute uses an income of US \$7500 per person (in terms of purchasing parity power) in a particular household as the threshold for the consumer class. Its 2004 *State of the World* report estimates that there are 1.7 billion people who belong to the consumer class. Of these, 349 million live in Western Europe (89% of the population), 271 million (85% of the population) live in the USA and Canada, 240 million in China (19% of the population), 122 million in India (12% of the population) and 34.2 million in sub-Saharan Africa.

Other ways to describe the consumer class would be in terms of variables such as the consumption of electricity, the consumption of various raw materials (paper, metals, water, cement), the size of housing in square meters per person, the regular consumption of animal products and the use of private vehicles. One may add indicators such as access to good education, the availability of medical aid and some form of financial insurance. Those in the consumer class account for up to 86% of private consumption expenditures while the poorest fifth of the world’s human population account for only 1%.