

BOOKLETS FROM THE CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF SWEDEN – #18B



Protect the Earth that God Loves

The Churches of Sweden on
Climate and Sustainable Development

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THIS BOOKLET ON CLIMATE and sustainable development is produced by the Working group on climate and sustainable development of the Christian Council of Sweden.

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Forward

THE GLOBAL CLIMATE situation is becoming serious and critical. Time for effecting change is rapidly shortening.

OUR PATTERN OF LIVING influences the conditions for our survival. The increase in global warming, economic and social injustice as well as an ecologically unsustainable lifestyle, is already threatening many people's lives and will continue to do so in future generations. The threat even encompasses the many different species that have a right to exist together with the human race on the earth.

THE CHURCHES ARE UNITED in declaring that God has called us all to protect creation. How this is expressed and argued varies according to the different Christian traditions and is particularly evident when a document is to be formulated together. Different emphases and thinking come to the fore where not all feel comfortable with how they are expressed. However, there is a basic common belief that God loves creation and wants to protect it for its future survival. God is completely against a damaged and spoiled creation.

THIS BOOKLET IS DESIGNED to help churches generate opportunities for discussion on some of the world's current and reoccurring issues. Sustainable development includes many different issues, and the booklet can help us reflect from a broad perspective although its main focus is on climate as this is an area where changes can and should be swiftly instigated.

We hope that many will participate in the discussion and be challenged to act.

For the Christian Council of Sweden (signed 2013)
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CHAPTER 1

Background: The Cry of the Earth

We are living in a unique time of world history

MANY PEOPLE'S LIVING conditions in the world have greatly improved during the last decades. Millions of people have been able to leave a life of poverty for a more reasonable standard of living. Average life expectancy has increased, infant mortality has decreased. More children than ever have the opportunity to go to school. Women have begun to experience a new freedom that has led to legitimate gender equality. Democracy has made progress in many nations.

At the same time, there are signs that more serious threats are rising that strike at the very foundations of the future for both mankind and God's creation. Never before have people had such great capacity to influence the eco-systems, the basis for life on earth, and yet the threats have never been greater.

RESEARCHERS AT THE Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI) have conducted a large international study that surveyed and defined how much the planet can tolerate through formulating the so-called Planetary Boundaries. Eight areas of problems are defined as threats towards life on earth from which the researchers then deduced important challenges.

According to the most reliable knowledge available, we are living close to or above the limits for the earth's capacity to renew itself. A number of areas are in risk zones, for example, the biological diversity, the acidification of the oceans, the nitrogen cycle and the access to drinkable water.

THE MOST ACUTE issue is climate. We already see how unexpected climate related incidents cause destruction and suffering for millions of people. A broad majority of climate researchers warn that an acceleration of global warming will lead to many more problems for people living in certain parts of the world. And, as so often happens, women and children are the most affected.

Global challenges

Human beings are to respect and protect creation. But greed at many levels, self-centeredness and a belief in unlimited growth have brought exploitation and destruction on the earth and its creatures.

The cries of the poor and vulnerable echo in the groans of the earth. Excessive consumption of fossil fuels and other limited resources is doing violence to people and the planet.

Climate change as a consequence of human lifestyles poses a global threat to just peace.

Global warming, the rise of sea levels and the increasing frequency and intensity of droughts and floods affect especially the most vulnerable populations in the world.

Indigenous people are exemplary in sustainable living and, along with inhabitants of coral atolls and impoverished coastal communities, they are among those who contribute the least to global warming. Yet they are the ones who will suffer the most.

(An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace 33)

The Church's responsibility

THE CHURCH TEACHES that creation is a gift given and maintained by God (this is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter). It has the capacity for people to live and develop. Climate changes and other threats against creation force us to look for answers to important moral and spiritual questions.

THE CHURCHES ARE FACING three great challenges. The first, called the intellectual challenge, is related to qualified research regarding how the reality of climate threats influences how we express our theological convictions. The second is the Church's prophetic voice as related to the urgency of the challenge: What does the Church have to say? The third challenge relates to the shaping of a Christian lifestyle that gives out a strong testimony towards impacting society.

All these challenges are extremely important and need to be addressed quickly and existentially where the churches re-evaluate its thinking from previous years when one talked more about exploitation of the earth. Our answers to these challenges show whether or not we have a theology that is relevant for our time.

THE CHURCHES IN SWEDEN work together on these issues in the Christian Council of Sweden's working group on climate and sustainable development. As churches, we have a basic calling to communicate a strong and enduring hope for mankind's future on the earth. This stems from the basis that Christians have responsibility for preserving creation and the churches have a mandate to contribute to this preservation.

Another aspect is the doctrine of salvation through Christ that not only applies to people but also to the whole of God's creation in all its diversity. The Church must be faithful to its prophetic calling in society.

If there are opposing views between how science reveals society and the political stance of those in power, the Church must naturally place itself on the side of truth, meaning the views represented by the world's leading researchers. These key issues need to be integrated into the whole life of the Christian church.

What should our relationship be to God who is the origin and goal for everything?

How do we balance our consumption of energy and other material resources with the needs of the poorest communities, of future generations and its effect on different species?

How do we maintain hope in the midst of fear and denial?

How can we encourage global cooperation, challenge unsustainable economic systems and change our lifestyles?

Call from Operation Noah,
England, spring 2012

Therefore we want

- our politicians to take a political stance on climate that focuses on those who are most vulnerable, nationally and internationally

Therefore we oppose

- the one-sided belief that society must continue to develop at all costs and the excessive exploitation of the earth's resources
- the tendency to not take seriously the challenges of scientific research

Therefore we encourage each other to

- be engaged in issues concerning long-term sustainability and a just world
- intensify our theological understanding of the basis for our Christian involvement in these issues through analysis of both the more traditional interpretations that focus on peace and the environment and on new areas, for example, eco-feministic theology

CHAPTER 2

Theology: God's Beloved Creation

God's continuing work

How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Psalm 104:24 (NIV)

THE BIBLE AND THE DOCTRINES of the church describe the world, people and all aspects of nature as a close love relation between God and God's creation. The Old Testament (OT) is full of rich texts related to the diversity and ingenuity of God's creation.

The universe in all its facets, is holy, designed and formed by God. Creation is continually evolving. The New Testament (NT) carries this view of creation further into the life of the Church. Jesus and Paul lived in a conscious understanding of the world of the Old Testament with deep insights into its texts.

The Church Fathers, the teachers of the early church, continued in the same line of thinking.

ACCORDING TO CHRISTIAN beliefs, the universe was created from God's own being. *For from him and through him and for him are all things.* (Romans 11:36 NIV).

Regarding Christ, Colossians 1:16 says, *For in him all things were created... all things have been created through him and for him.* The prologue of John's Gospel (1:1-4), concerning the Word, can also be understood as a creation narrative of how we belong to God, each other and the earth.

ACCORDING TO THE CREATION narratives, mankind was created through a decision made within the triune God. *Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness ...* (Genesis 1:26) Mankind is created to exist in a unique way. The Orthodox tradition speaks of mankind as creation's micro-cosmos that summarises unity of creation; mankind is a "world within a world".

Biblical terminology expresses the task of mankind to be king, priest and prophet of creation: as a king to maintain creation, as a priest to mediate thanksgiving to God and as a prophet to cultivate creation and bring it to fulfilment.

Creation, salvation and consummation in Jesus Christ

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant.

Isaiah 24:4-5 (NIV)

GOD LOOKS TO CREATION in the effort to care for and save the world. Even the new covenant through Jesus Christ concerns the whole of creation. Salvation is not just concerned with the forgiveness and reconciliation of mankind.

Christ is not only the fulfilment of the promise given to Abraham and Moses. Christ is also the fulfilment of the promise to Noah and all created beings on the earth. It is written in Romans 8:20-21 (NIV): *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

THE RECONCILIATION AND VICTORY gained by Christ at Easter relates to all creation. Creation's different dimensions are contained within the vision of heaven. In Revelations 5:13 (NIV) we read that ... *every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea...* gathered in praise before the throne of the Lamb in thanksgiving for salvation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

God created the world, made it perfect and gave mankind life in abundance. But sin destroyed people's relationship with one another and with creation. Creation longs that God's

children will be stewards of life, justice and love. (Genesis 2:1-3, John 10:10, Romans 8:20-22).

An Ecumenical Call
to Just Peace 33a

THE CREATED WORLD is the place for the incarnation, God becoming man. Creation and the incarnation are prerequisites for one another and are links in the work of God. That God takes the form of a man is to underline the importance of the created world and its significance for the spiritual dimension of life.

Our spirituality is practised in the created world reflecting the love that brings new creation. Without the incarnation there can be no salvation, without creation, no salvation. Everything is performed on the stage of creation. It can be theologically described as God's work as Father, Son and Spirit, the triune God.

IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION this may be described as mankind's own liberation and transformation is contributing to the salvation of the creation. When mankind turned away from God, it led to death and destruction, reducing the divinely ordained process of growth and maturity that should continue until its consummation.

The mandate given to mankind as king, priest and prophet is exercised in the context of death, influencing choices and actions that have certain consequences for the whole of creation. God becoming man in Jesus, followed by His resurrection from the dead, opened the way for new conditions that would enable creation including mankind to attain consummation.

Mankind's reconciliation with God leads to reconciliation with nature. Creation, salvation and consummation are in the deepest meaning one course of events.

THE ORTHODOX TRADITION places the Church as central in the whole course of events. It is convinced that the Church is an eternal and immortal institution in mortal time and space.

This is manifested through its tradition, theology, written texts, liturgy, icons, and the whole spectrum of church life. The Church has a unique task with infinitely greater breadth, length, height and depth (Ephesians 3:18). As the body of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18), the Church is the starting point and goal of creation, the kingdom of heaven on earth, uniting creation with its Creator, mankind with God.

All that lives and breathes is holy and beautiful in the eyes of God. The whole world is a sacrament. The whole created cosmos is a sign of God's original energy.

And mankind stands as a priest at the altar of creation, as

a micro cosmos and a mediator. This is the true nature of things ... if we have the eyes of faith to see it.

All His Holiness Bartholomaios, Patriarch of Constantinople

Some other relevant theological themes

THE STORY OF NOAH gives us important reasons for an ecological theology. God gives Noah a legitimate mandate to save all the ecosystems on the earth. If these systems do not survive, then there is no future for mankind. God wants to preserve all the created species. It was here that God established the first covenant.

This differentiated from the later covenant that was established only with the people of Israel. The earth with all its diversity should not be destroyed again if mankind was faithful to its part of the covenant and followed God's will. It is a promise that holds true in our own struggle for the environment.

Other significant and relevant themes concern the laws regulating the Sabbath and the Jubilee years as well as the whole eschatological vision that encompasses nature and all that is created within it.

God's beloved creation and the role of mankind

THE IDEA OF MAN as steward runs like a red thread throughout the whole Bible and the life of the Church. The Greek word for steward is *oikonomos* and is the root for our word economy. Catholic and Protestant theology particularly draw attention to this term as a modern expression for mankind's relation as a responsible being to God. Men and women together were given the task to have dominion over creation, often expressed in the Bible as God's household, *oikonomia*.

To be made in the image of God is to be a caretaker/steward of creation. The steward does not own the earth. *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it* (Psalm 24:1 NIV). However the relationship between the owner and the steward is a tender fellowship of love where the steward has received infinite confidence and responsibility from God for managing all the different facets of creation. The steward has a unique position in creation having received this enormous responsibility.

A Christian holistic vision

THE ESSENCE OF THE dominating theological traditions give us no reason to differentiate environmental issues from humanitarian or

justice issues. The ecological reality is the basis for our existence. The way in which we organise the social and economic aspects of our lives and society takes place within the perimeters of ecological reality. Financial and climate crises are therefore intimately connected.

Christians need to be aware of God's will in these basic issues, for the continued existence of mankind. Christ died to reconcile all creation with God. Those who neglect to care for creation deny the very foundation of the message of the Bible. Mankind itself is part of the web of life, being completely dependent on all the eco-systems God created. Without them there can be no future.

EVEN THOUGH THE CHURCHES have different traditions, it is basically united in viewing God as the great Creator and Sustainer of everything. This conviction, at least the most fundamental parts, is shared by other world religions. Every individual Christian should make a responsible contribution to the world's continuing existence because the holy scriptures and the life and traditions of the Church have revealed this as God's will for creation.

All Christians, beginning in their own domestic situation, should accept their own individual responsibility for responding to the broad view of salvation through Jesus Christ and sanctification in the Holy Spirit found in the teachings of Bible and the Church.

When Christians work towards renewal of the world, we function as salt of the earth and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14) and become a sign of hope. When the Church worships, we remember God's work of creation and reconciliation.

People of faith are hearing about climate change from the media, but more importantly, they are hearing it preached from the pulpit, spoken in the mosques and synagogues.

This issue requires a deep moral and religious perspective. How we respond will dictate the future for generations to come. People living today will have to decide if we want our legacy to

be one of destruction or one of healing and reconciliation.

Our response will show whether or not we love our neighbours (neighbours near and far or neighbours in the next generation) and also our love for God and His Creation.

Rev Sally Bingham, priest in the Episcopal Church, USA (Love God Heal Earth, page vii)

Therefore we want

- that churches in fellowship together give space for reflection concerning mankind and creation with reference to the Bible and tradition
- that churches and denominations, as partners in the international ecumenical movement, give particular attention to environment and sustainability issues during the period in the church year (1st September to the second Sunday in October) that is called Creation time
- that these eco-theological issues be included in the education of pastors, priests and deacons providing a visible link between ecology, economy and the view of mankind

Therefore we oppose

- a theology that does not express the triune nature of God: Father – Creator, Son – Saviour and Spirit – Giver of life
- interpretations of the Bible that describe mankind as an independent ruler rather than a steward with a mandate from God

Therefore we encourage one another

- to continue and renew a deep long-term involvement in our church and adhere to its biblical foundations, emphasising thanksgiving, humbleness, courage, desire for justice, contentedness and simplicity in lifestyle, love, peace as well as faith and hope
- to permeate our worship services with prayer and praise to the God who creates, saves and gives us life
- to promote worship services that are characterised by God-given hope and courageousness
- to look for ecumenical forums for reflection and worship
- to be committed to our calling as kings, priests and prophets concerning the issues of climate and the environment
- to search for cooperation and discussion with other organisations working on these issues

CHAPTER 3

Climate and Global Development

FOR MILLIONS OF YEARS climate has developed in a way that has been stable and favourable for the development of mankind. However, we can now see an increase in the way man is influencing climate that is both worrying and threatening. Industrialisation meant enormous progress in the development of the human race with many positive advances that we gratefully receive.

The increased use of fossil fuels and advances in technology have enabled society to be transformed from using human and animal muscle power to the use of much stronger machines.

Through the explosion of scientific knowledge we have gained access to new areas of understanding such as the secret of the DNA spiral and greater knowledge of the cosmos. For many this has led to a longer life span and less suffering.

THIS DEVELOPMENT HAS also caused some undesirable consequences. Fossil fuels are cheap raw products with high energy levels that started the ball rolling. At the same time carbon dioxide emissions from these fossil fuels have contributed excessively to climate changes.

A critical question today is how to slow down the emission of greenhouse gases. The climates of the world are complex systems and they are not so easy to understand or foresee. The United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other researchers state clearly that it is high time to change our way of living together on the earth.

We need to change from a development that is dependent on fossil fuels to discovering new ways of managing the forests and methods of cultivating the earth.

THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE on Environment and Development (The Earth Summit) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, formulated and ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Climate Convention). For the last twenty years it has tried to unite the world's richest countries in a binding agreement to reduce its emissions while at the same time enabling low income countries the possibility to develop.

The Kyoto Protocol is an international treaty that extended the Climate Convention to encourage industrial countries to make binding commitments in reducing their emissions. It also created mechanisms that made it possible for rich countries to implement interventions that minimise their influences on climate in other countries. Unfortunately there is a great deal of passiveness in the working of social structures, low inclination for instigating change and maybe even some lack of understanding as to the severity of the global situation, so very little progress has been made. At the same time a number of research reports indicate that we are going in the wrong direction.

Turbulence within economic systems in the last few years has led to even more passiveness and declining inclination to follow the international long-term agreement. The follow-up conference of the United Nations's work with sustainable development, Rio + 20 held in 2012, unfortunately was characterized by the same pattern.

There is not sufficient commitment and desire for change among those countries with strong economies. The longer time goes by without any significant change, we risk facing serious changes in climate that would particularly affect development in countries with weak economies, especially for women and children. It is often the case, that the world's poor who least contribute to influencing climate change, are those who are the first to be affected by its consequences.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IS about not using more of the earth's resources than is possible to replace within a reasonable period of time (for example, forests). It is also concerned with using resources in a just way (see the next section). The challenges that face the world and the rapidity needed to avoid greater depletion of the ecological systems demand that we examine our present way of viewing society and how we live. Climate, as one issue among many concerning sustainability, is not only a scientific and political issue, it is even more an ethical and spiritual challenge. As churches and denominations, we have an important role to play if we take our mandate seriously.

Therefore we want

- that the churches, together with other strong actors, prepare people mentally and spiritually for the great changes that are going to take place
- that the churches contribute with forums for reflection and values for instigating change to a more sustainable lifestyle
- that governments and parliaments take courageous decisions in order to stimulate energy efficiency and encourage development of renewable energy sources
- that governments and parliaments support international agreements for strong political action for progressive climate change
- that churches actively participate in ecumenical networks and advocacy in the United Nations, the European Union and other international organisations
- that churches take concrete action to minimise our ecological footprints

Therefore we oppose

- that the goal of 40% reduction of emissions by 2020 occurs not only in Sweden but also partly extends to include other countries

Therefore we encourage one another

- to assess our properties from a climate, environmental and sustainable viewpoint
- to be active in environmental organisations both inside and outside the churches
- to choose a lifestyle in solidarity with preserving nature's resources, particularly energy
- to work for more "green/sustainable churches"
- to use various recommended methods already practised by churches for attaining sustainability (for example, the Environmental Certificate and the Steps of Light from the Church of Sweden or program of Creation Friendly Churches of the Uniting Church in Sweden, or similar)

CHAPTER 4

Climate Justice

TODAY, A MINORITY OF the world's people have a higher material development and living standard than anyone ever have had in history. Researchers declare that it would take about three more earth globes to enable all of the world's population to live as well-to-do Swedes today.

Many researchers in countries around the world are united in their findings that the earth's resources are being used at a higher rate than they can be replaced. The natural resources account is overspent. In spite of knowledge showing that mankind is going in the wrong direction, the overuse of the earth's resources has not diminished.

Climate justice is a term, used by the World Council of Churches and others, to point out the importance of understanding the issue of climate as an issue of justice. We stand today on the brink of a situation where the world's population demand their right to a reasonable lifestyle (global justice) and future generations' right to inherit a liveable earth (inter-generational justice).

COUNTRIES OF THE global north have historically contributed most to destructive emissions. If emissions are calculated per capita, the picture is clear. Justice should mean that those countries that have won the most from emissions should take the greater responsibility both for minimising their own emissions and assist other countries so that they can build their development on sustainable energy sources.

GROWTH MAY BE desired and need not be considered as negative in itself. But the world needs a new way of thinking and another way of measuring development than the rather blunt Gross National Product (GNP) that to a large degree steers investments and decisions. It is not enough to make adjustments to what we call environmental friendly solutions. A paradigm shift is needed. The issue of how many peoples' livelihoods can be supported on the earth needs to be worked through both practically and theologically.

The big question is, how can we use the earth's resources in a sustainable way? We need to think in new ways and promote values from the perspective of the vulnerable and oppressed. The situation is serious; the consumption and use of resources in rich countries prevent the possibility for many of the world's least developed countries to have reasonable living standards.

The global North (which is not the same as the geographical north) must minimise its ecological footprint and the global South must receive an increased amount of the earth's resources.

BELONGING TO AN ECUMENICAL global fellowship, we cannot turn a blind eye to these immense injustices. As churches in more wealthy parts of the world, we need to constantly remind our own context of the aspects of global justice when dealing with the issue of climate.

Our use of the earth's resources is paid for by people who have the least resources themselves and face a future of ruined possibilities. Drastically reduced harvests, destroyed infrastructure, scarcity of water, people forced to flee are all examples of the worsening scenario for the next generation. Prostitution and trafficking are often a consequence when women are forced into fleeing from their homes.

A more equal proportioning of the earth's resources is not only a prophetic statement on justice but also necessary to enable mankind to survive under reasonable living conditions.

OUR PATTERNS OF PRODUCTION and consumption need to be redirected towards more solidarity. Churches and denominations need to ask themselves: What is necessary for a good life? How can we best take care of the gifts of the earth? How can we understand our situation in which we find ourselves – one humanity and one earth? Behaviour and patterns can be changed. There is joy in living a simple life. We can defiantly dare to think new and differently in how we use the resources we have and how we participate in debates in our society.

Promoting justice means to demand responsibility from both governments and companies.

JUST AS WE SHARE bread with one another in the sacrament of Holy Communion, so we are sharing the earth with one another. Bread shared is sufficient for everyone. We who have a good material living standard should ask ourselves; what is the most important in life – more possessions and status or more love, fellowship, solidarity and justice?

Our mandate is to take care of the gift we have received, life in

God's creation. It concerns how we treat our oppressed and vulnerable sisters and brothers who are already experiencing the effects of climate related catastrophes and discuss how our lives are linked and weaved together.

Therefore we want

- that our government addresses the issue of long-term sustainability more decisively in the European Union and the United Nations
- support for research on development and livelihoods using other models than the economically based GNP
- that the term "green economy" is understood to mean an economy that is steered towards preserving the world's eco-systems giving priority to sustainable alternatives

Therefore we oppose

- living standards that are only defined from growth contained with the economically based GNP
- governments that transfer funds allocated for development cooperation to interventions with focus on climate
- that sensitive areas in the Arctic and other areas are exploited
- that "green economy" is used to cover up continued exploitation of natural resources and people in the world

Therefore we encourage each other

- to be creative in our ambitions to work for a more just world
- to live a lifestyle that makes it possible for people to make alternative choices so that challenges are seriously addressed
- to continue to be the voice for the poor and the global south in our own communities and churches
- to learn from the experience of indigenous people in order to understand mankind's relationship to creation
- to choose food that is "climate smart", for example, reducing the consumption of meat
- to be involved in organisations such as Diakonia, Caritas, the international work of our churches, Orthaid etc

CHAPTER 5

An Enduring Hope

The kind of hope I often think about (especially in hopeless situations like being in prison) is, I believe, a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us or we don't.

Hope is not a prognostication – it's an orientation of the spirit. Each of us must find real, fundamental hope within himself. You can't delegate that to anyone else.

Hope in the deep powerful sense is not the same as joy when things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for

success, but rather an ability to work for something to succeed.

Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It's not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. It is this hope, above all, that gives us strength to live and to continually try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now.

Vaclav Havel, Czech author and former president (in an article in the magazine *Esquire*)

PROGNOSIS FROM CLIMATE RESEARCH must be taken seriously. However the social and economic implications and predictions should not be seen as determined. They can be changed and it is possible to influence the future. Hope is the crucial factor.

THE APOSTLE PAUL WROTE: *Against all hope, Abraham held on to hope and believed* (Romans 4:18 NIV). Even with the threat of climate changes hanging over us, hope and faith are the essential values of life that the Church can offer. They are deeply entwined in one another in a dynamic unity. Hope speaks against despair. The faith of the Church has been formulated in times of threats and oppression, by Christians who participated in the struggle against evil powers in society.

Even when Jesus lived on the earth, there were people who calculated that the end of the earth was near. Hope was not built on visible progress but on another foundation. They proclaimed a hope against all odds, a defiant hope!

A KEY TEXT CONCERNING the Christian hope in the New Testament is linked directly to a crucial text about the salvation of creation. *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?* (Romans 8:22-24 NIV). Paul connects the future of creation with the salvation of man.

GENUINE CHRISTIAN HOPE BRINGS together both a personal and practical commitment that is somewhat disturbing and challenging. It is the basis for concern that often leads to some sort of breakthrough, sometimes expressed in a radical action that enables progress towards the future. It means taking a concrete step in the direction of realization of God's kingdom.

It demands courage to dare to hope! Hope can exist in despair but is supported by God's promise. The Christian hope inspires action to a new direction, to conversion.

OUR GREATEST EFFORTS AND wholehearted involvement in climate issues often appear totally insufficient against the political reality that steers the world. But still we hope! We know that God wants an earth characterised by justice, peace and a sustainable eco-system.

We also believe that God has given us a rational mind to enable us to understand what must be done. We count on God and power from the resurrected Christ to give us strength in the struggle for change. We can hear the consolation of the Holy Spirit in our innermost being.

THE TIME IS RIPE for intensive action! The Bible says that man was not created purely by chance. Mankind has a task. Our lives are times of grace on the brink of eternity. We are called to radical action, to be God's co-worker when the lives and value of people and the whole creation are threatened.

THE GREEK WORD KAIROS means the right moment and is not just any particular time. It is the time for possibilities to be

birthed, the dynamic hopeful period of time that God uses for us to act and work out solutions to bring us out of the crisis. Maybe even Mother Earth's fever peak can be reduced and brought under control.

In the understanding of the Church, Christ himself lives in this *kairos*. In Mark 1:15, a short revival sermon, Jesus says, *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*. These words became the beginning of a world revolution at that time and should now lead to a complete turnaround of the world during the 21st century's second decade.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

(Romans 15:13 NIV)

Prayer

God of heaven and earth,
send your Spirit over us
who receive the Bread of Life
and the Cup of Blessing.

Help us to be the body of Christ in the world.
Let us see the whole of creation
and set our hearts aflame
with love and care for all living creatures.

Let the day soon come
when creation will be freed from slavery under destructive powers
and attain that same freedom God's children receive
when they are perfected and glorified.

*Prayer from the worship service conducted during the Theology
Festival arranged by the Church of Sweden in 2012.*

Further reading

An Ecumenical Call for Just Peace, World Council of Churches

2011

www.oikoumene.org

Protect the Earth that God Loves

A statement on climate and sustainable development from the churches of Sweden

THE CLIMATE SITUATION IS BECOMING serious and critical. Time for effecting change is rapidly shortening. The worldwide Church is engaged in the issues of climate as it affects the churches' innermost being where creation is to be cared for and protected, not used and exhausted.

OUR FUTURE IS THREATENED BY:

- increased global warming
- economic and social injustice
- ecologically unsustainable lifestyles

THIS BOOKLET CONTAINS MATERIAL that will help in discussing some of the world's most pressing issues. Christian theology is discussed together with issues of global development and justice.

It describes how churches from different theological traditions are united in the belief that God loves and wants to preserve creation and its future.

The prognosis from climate research must be taken seriously. It is still possible to influence the future.

THIS BOOKLET IS COMPILED by a working group from the Christian Council of Sweden.



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