



General Synod item 4/2007

Threatened life – a faith response.

The church's testimony in the light of climate change, environmental efforts and the relationship between consumption and justice

General Synod committee's remarks:

The Church's mission to protect sacredness. The fragrance of sacredness protects the earth; without it the earth will be no more than a piece of raw material. If the earth and its life should be degraded to mere raw material, the earth would rise against humankind in the greatest slave revolt in history.

Martin Lönnebo, Swedish Bishop Emeritus at the General Synod 2007.

The climate threat requires action. This item's documents demonstrate that within the church of Norway there is now increased support for environmental concern. But we have not come far enough. We are looking for new measures that can bring us forward. We seek a spiritual language that may offer renewal and give the church power to continue and expand its involvement for the environment. We rejoice in the multitude of important contributions from various theological and spiritual traditions. We remember the General Synod 1996 resolution - shaped as a liturgy, and the placard "The Cry from a Wounded Earth". This year's Youth Synod gave us important impulses under the topic "ecological faith" (UKM 04-2007). The Bishops have recently underlined the same in a brief and crisp document summarised in "It is urgent, it costs, it works" (BM-26/07).

In various ways this year's General Synod has confirmed that there is now an urgent need to move on. The situation calls for a decisive break-through for new attitudes and new patterns of action, not the least in the rich part of the world. Many are speaking of a shift of paradigm, that is a profound change in basic values, attitudes and patterns of action for individuals and for our society. We are aware of the fact that the church has a particular responsibility in this process, and that there are many who have expectations to the further involvement of the church. The Government Minister for Environment and International Development, Mr. Erik Solheim, confirmed this in his speech to the General Synod this year.

As a church we are not only challenged by climate change but also by the poverty that a large part of the world's population are living under. Churches in the south are calling out to us. We have been reminded that this also has to do with how the international economic institutions

are functioning, i.a. via the World Council of Churches AGAPE process. We refer to another item at this year's General Synod, "Economic globalisation as a challenge to churches" (KM-10/07), where this perspective has been developed.

The committee has concluded that there is need for a new and profound *reform* in our church, to clarify the church's task faced with these challenges. We need long-term thinking and action now. The committee sees that inspiration may be sought from two important on-going reform processes in the church, the reform of religious education and the liturgy reform. At the same time the contents of this sustainability reform must be reflected in the other reforms. In the liturgy we receive new strength to lift threatened life up to God; in religious education we must pass this on to children and young people. There is a similarity also in that these are central processes which over time will cause visible changes in the church as such.

The committee has chosen to focus on a well-known concept that communicates in a wider context than the Church. *Sustainability* had a final break-through with the Brundtland Commission's report to the UN in 1987. If we do not succeed in creating a pattern of values and kind of consumption which can make development sustainable, we know this will lead humankind and life on the earth into a profound crisis.

The committee recognises that these are responsible and long-term processes, and has chosen to focus on a ten-year perspective. The aim is that all parishes shall be "green" parishes and each local joint church council be certified as an "environmental lighthouse". To achieve this we need concrete milestones on the road ahead.

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says: "Do penance etc.", he wants the entire life of believers to be a penance.

Martin Luther, 1517, 1st thesis on the Wittenberg church door).

Ten years will take us to 2017. This will be an important year for a church which has the Lutheran reformation as its historic starting point. It will then be 500 years since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg. Luther's challenge was another than ours. But we see a deep, inner harmony between his project and the challenges we are facing today. In both cases the challenge is to discern the link between a liberating faith and a life of service.

On our way towards the reformation celebration it is vital for us to keep our focus on the liberating centre of faith, as we were reminded of also by Bishop Martin Lönnebo. Faith creates wonder, joy and humility over God's splendid creation. Faith gives courage to confront reality as it is, it challenges us to a life in self-denial and it brings hope.

The Lutheran reformation inspires us to speak clearly and act courageously. We are also inspired by many other spiritual currents, as the traditions of indigenious peoples and their spirituality linked to the earth and their humility towards creation.

The life of humankind is inserted into the life of the earth. This is the indigenious attitude to this issue. In the era of climate crisis we should perhaps realise that it is in humbly bowing towards the earth that we may really be stretching towards heaven.

Tore Johnsen, moderator of the Church of Norway Sami Council, at General Synod 2007.

By focussing on a decade and inspired by the faith of the Lutheran reformation, we hope by the end of this period to see clear signs of change in the life of the Church – caused by this sustainability reform.

The practical and economic sides of the matter have not been looked into properly yet, but as documented by the status report, there is already much knowledge, considerable experience and a clear involvement for this in the church. Many tools are in place and relations and networks have been established. Central processes and steering documents, as e.g. the liturgy reform, the reform of religious education, the communication platform and the Church of Norway strategy plan all mention the issue.

A reform will imply systematizing all this and committing the various representatives of the church. The committee does not foresee heavy administrative processes, but rather clear priorities in church plans, as is already the case in the plan for diaconal service passed by this year's General Synod. In the committee's view the implementing of the new diaconal plan will be an excellent starting point for the sustainability reform.

The contents of the sustainability reform will be of concern to all levels of the church and will imply broad cooperation, in Norway as well as internationally. At home this is not the least the case in our cooperation with the Association of employers in the Church of Norway (KA), educational establishments, trade unions and independent organisations. In a global perspective we need to cooperate with organisations like the Norwegian Church Aid, mission agencies, sister churches and ecumenical organisations.

The committee is grateful for active involvement in and numerous inputs to our work in this issue, and we ask the Church of Norway National Council to bring these inputs along in the further work.

The committee recognises that a reform like this will depend on structural changes and new priorities in the way the church works. This will also imply the need for additional means for environmental efforts. We challenge the Government to contribute economically to make it possible for the church to carry through this sustainability reform.

The Youth Synod 2007 has challenged us:

Our mission was to manage God's creation – not to govern it. But what has happened? What are we doing to our earth, to each other and to ourselves? In pain we recognise that we as human beings and as church have failed in our mission. With the man outside Jericho we need to cry out: "Kyrie eleison, Lord let us see again! Open our eyes so we may recognise the beauty of nature, of each other and ourselves. God give us the strength and the will to act."

General Synod resolution:

*Be a voice in our time, speaking rightly on the vital issues. Give people hope.
Learn people humility. Use your large network.*

Erik Solheim, Government Minister for Environment and
International Development, to the General Synod 2007.

The Church of Norway is part of a global church fellowship believing in God as Creator, Saviour and the Upholder of all life. Humankind is both part of the biological diversity of the earth and has at the same time been given a special mission to care for God's creation. Human-made climate changes are taking place now. People in exposed parts of the world are already fighting the effects of climate change. The present climate changes make it necessary for the Church of Norway to adopt a clear attitude and demand responsible action from itself and others.

The General Synod has taken into consideration the report on environmental efforts and the relationship between consumption and justice, grateful to all who have contributed with their involvement, responsibility and actions.

In this process necessary tools have been developed and good networks have been established. The scope of climate changes and their serious consequences require that this involvement must not be weakened in the years to come, but rather be intensified on all levels of the church. Everyone should participate with practical action and contribute to a basic change of attitude. The General Synod wants to underline that the work for justice and for the protection of creation is a consequence of the faith in God as Creator, Saviour and Giver of life.

The earth's lifeboat has two oars, the technical one and the ethical one. What is important for the Church is to join all people of good will around the ethical oar.

Martin Lönnebo, Swedish Bishop Emeritus at the General Synod 2007.

1. The General Synod challenges Church of Norway national and diocesan councils to:

- immediately launch a sustainability reform to last until the Lutheran reformation anniversary in 2017, with effect on all activities of the church.

The General Synod realises that profound changes will be needed. Resources will have to be used according to new priorities and application for state financing will be necessary for major cooperation projects. The General Synod requests the Church of Norway National Council to present a milestone plan with annual goals to the Synod's session in 2008, and to include the sustainability reform in the Church of Norway strategy plan.

- work to clarify the ecological dimension of faith in all Church activities and in ecumenical cooperation with other churches. Individuals and parishes must be assisted in promoting an "earthbound Christian practice" where they follow Christ in the service for creation and fellow human beings. The General Synod requests that material be prepared for reflection and use in the parishes; to renew the faith, challenge to involvement and action and strengthen hope. This should also be a central topic in inter-faith dialogues.
- to involve and educate Church workers in this field. Parishes will need to cooperate on the deanery level, and lines of communication will have to be established for this work between parishes and the dioceses. Necessary structures will have to be established on the national and regional level. The excellent cooperation with environmental, solidarity and mission organisations must be developed further.

- to develop a special field of activity in each diocese, linked to regional specialities (e.g. local food in the Diocese of Nidaros, Sellafield and oil exploration in the Diocese of Sør-Hålogaland).
- to challenge employers' and employees' organisations to see their joint responsibility in countering the continued growth of consumption and rather to demonstrate solidarity with our descendants and with people in other parts of the world. The Bishops should lead these efforts.

Only when someone manages to describe an environment-friendly society we will be happy to live in, things will happen – and then things may happen quickly.

Meteorologist Siri Kalvig quoting Jon Bing at the General Synod 2007.

2. The General Synod challenges parishes and local joint church councils to:

- give all parishes courage and guidance to live out the faith in a way which demonstrates that we are part of nature with a special management responsibility. In this we may receive much knowledge and inspiration from the traditions of the aboriginal peoples.
- to cooperate broadly with societies and organisations locally.
- to follow Christ in their lives and realise that charity today also implies involvement for the environment.
- to lift up the joy of a simpler life in our consumer society. The key to a necessary change of attitudes is to be found in self-denial and in the joy of a committed fellowship.
- to become "greener" parishes and work to have local joint church councils certified as "environmental lighthouses".
- to actively use tools like Grønn Kirkebok ("Green church book") and the Church Network for the Environment, Consumption and Justice.
- to celebrate "Creation Day" and to use the times of Advent and Lent to focus on environmental involvement.

To reduce our living standard is no easy exercise. Yesterday the Bishops told us to increase our life quality.

Dean Ingrid Vad Nilsen, moderator of the Church of Norway Council on Foreign and Ecumenical Relations, quoting daily newspaper Nordlys after the service on World Environment Day 3 June 2007.

3. The General Synod challenges us as individuals to:

- admire the greatness of God's creation, to rejoice in his coming to the earth in Jesus Christ and to give thanks that through his Spirit he is creating and renewing life.

- to see that the good life first and foremost is found where we live. We do not need to travel all over the world to look for it.
- to make us conscious of what we can do, be concrete and live more simply in our daily life. The General Synod challenges everyone to join the consumer network "Grønn Hverdag" (Green Daily Life), take the "environmental stride" and the climate test and make a personal climate promise (www.gronnhverdag.no and www.klimaloftet.no).
- to support and challenge fellow human beings to make active environmental choices in their daily life.
- to work to put environmental and climate issues on the agenda in local, regional and national elections.
- to challenge local politicians to work for a sustainable development locally.

Let the eyes of your grandchild be your confessional mirrors.

Martin Lønnebo, Swedish Bishop Emeritus at the General Synod 2007.

4. The General Synod challenges the Government and the Parliament:

As a church we will support concrete and courageous efforts for the benefit of ourselves, coming generations and all life on earth. Thus, with all people of good will we challenge the Government and the Storting (Parliament) to form an all-party alliance to adopt a comprehensive and ambitious climate agreement. This must lead to radical cuts in Norway's carbon emissions and contribute actively to a sustainable use of the earth's resources. Among other things this agreement must imply:

- that Norway will work for a new and far more ambitious climate agreement between all states, but with differentiated commitments.
- that Norway will increase its help to poor countries to adapt to climate changes. Rich countries must be challenged to pay their taxes on carbon emissions, in order for the income to be spent on climate projects in poor countries.
- that there must be a considerable increase in the research in and the use of renewable energy.
- that the extraction of petroleum will be carbon neutral as soon as possible.

As a petroleum producer and a manager of enormous incomes from this production, Norway has a particular responsibility. This responsibility must have the effect:

- that the petroleum industry does not lead to increased strain on vulnerable environments, particularly not in Arctic and other northern areas.
- that foreign investments of the Government Pension Fund be moved to sectors promoting climate-friendly energy.

- that a larger part of the Government Pension Fund be reserved for climate research.
- that considerable amounts of money be spent on immediate measures, as preventing the deforestation of areas with tropical rain forest.

The economic philosophy of growth, dominating in national as well as in private economy, is immoral. The UN Development Programme has stated that the consumption of resources in industrialised countries must be reduced to one tenth of the present level in order to be globally sustainable. Political authorities must implement necessary measures and demand that we all contribute.

We must all renounce some of our consumption for the benefit of the fellowship. Thus, political authorities must:

- present clear requirements to industry and formulate necessary regulations.
- adopt courageous and unpopular resolutions demanding something from us all.

Thus, there is urgent need for a national strategy and an action plan for sustainable development.

Almighty God, your wisdom is beyond our understanding.
We praise you for your greatness, imprinted in the earth and the sea
and the sky.
Through the web of creation you have given us a share in the gift of
life.
You have breathed the breath of life into us earthly beings,
Show us how to carry your image while in this threatened creation.
May your love and care for the creation be ours.
Give us the will and the strength to turn and to fight on the side of
life.
With faith in you, and together with the whole creation, we gather
together before you – in thankfulness for the gift of life, and in
prayer for the wounded earth.

*(Opening prayer in service on World Environment Day,
Tromsø 3 June 2007).*