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Being a Whole Person in a Broken World¹

The spiritual atmosphere can be pure and impure, life nourishing or stifling. The physical atmosphere can also be pure or polluted, life nourishing or stifling. In this context *pure air* means the abundance of man's physical living conditions, the pureness and the absence of harm in the whole ecological system, ensuring man's living space. It also means the balance, which has to exist between the food- and energy resources of our planet for the daily needs of its 7 billion inhabitants. There is a highly tense struggle going on for clean air, habitable earth in ecological as well as economic aspects. Our thesis: it is significant in which spiritual medium this battle takes place. The mere spiritual medium can contribute towards the solution of the problems, which the more and more polluted physical and economic climate brings about. But a polluted spiritual medium, created by man who wants to gauge things according to his own rules where his behavior is decided by narcissistic hunger for power and profit, by the rigors of his awareness of being mortal, can only worsen the ecological and economic disasters. What, now, are our most pressing troubles? The first part of my lecture will briefly list them on the basis of research results of highly qualified experts and international organizations, who are most knowledgeable in this field. In the 2nd part we will look for an answer to the question. What does the purity of the spiritual medium mean and to what extent does the living hope of the gospel contribute to this purity, the hope, which is visible even in situations without any prospects and which can wait: seeing one's neighbor in the light of the risen Christ, expecting the reality of a new heaven and a new earth – and not doom. And what man expects will also decide with what and how he will fill the time of waiting. A theological-believing consideration of the energy crisis may not be able to overcome it, but it can deal with the ailing individual who is called to deal with the energy crisis. By the way, the communities, which are organized on that basis, have the ability to render aid to those who were left alone with their troubles thus increasing their chances of surviving.

Keywords: ecology, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – IPCC, economic crisis, peak-oil theory, polluted and safe spiritual medium, Christian attitude, the practical relevance of waiting for a new earth and new heaven.

Coming from many countries with different religious, cultural, economic and political contexts you represent a diversity, which is actually a twofold reality. It is of consequence in which atmosphere, which spiritual realm the different values, yearnings, dreams and powers meet. In the realm of faith, hope and love, diversity means above all riches, blessing, such mildness and goodness, which completes a part of the other's reality. But there is also another medium: the realm of denying the values and life as nihilism, the realm of hopelessness and hate. If you transfer the various values, yearnings, dreams and powers to this

1. Paper submitted on the 39th congress of the *International Ecumenical Conference* organized by the IEF (International Ecumenical Fellowship) in Cluj-Napoca (Romania), on the 31st of June 2009. The topic of the conference was: *A New Heaven and a New Earth*.

stifling atmosphere, it becomes apparent that being different no longer means riches and blessing but adversity and enmity, battle for survival, a subtle way of making the wolves' instincts legitimate. The biblical vision of *a new heaven and a new earth* means the reality of the first life-giving medium, the realm of God, already now – on the old earth under the old sky. It is a privilege that we can meet in this country today.

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I.

Many responsible researchers of our time agree that mankind today is confronted by two questions affecting the whole planet and its entire population, one is global warming, the other one is the energy crisis involving the entire planet, both can have long term and disastrous consequences, if mankind cannot find an answer with a clear head and pure soul.

What is it all about? In the last third of the 20th century many scientists became aware of a minor warming of the earth's atmosphere, then only discernible on their gauging equipment. In the 1980s the debate was basically about whether such global warming

actually existed, and if so, was it obvious to maintain that it was a consequence of pollution by modern industrial civilization. Years ago the ONU a governmental committee (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – IPCC), which had to observe the change in climate, asked researchers to compile the various scientific results in order to reach applicable conclusions. Already in 1995 the results of research pointed out, that global warming had increased to a dangerous level, their only reason being the activities of man. In their last report of November 2007 they said it was *very probable* that the increase in the average temperature of the planet was *due to the gas emanations causing the greenhouse effect* since the middle of the 20th century. *Very probable* in scientific usage means something that could be verified with an accuracy of about 90%. The emanations of carbo dioxide stemming from fossil energies like oil, gases and coal also cause warming, which appears to be only to a small degree. On an average we are talking about an increase of 0,6 degree Celsius, which is predicted to reach 2,5 degrees Celsius by the end of the 21st century. Earths ecological system reacts to this increase in temperature caused by industrial emissions, barely perceptible to the human organism, by gradually losing its delicate balance. The present global warming has already brought about terrible changes. We would like to mention some of them:

- * The circulation of precipitation has been acutely disturbed. The extent of droughts and floods has drastically increased, because warm air can absorb much more humidity than cold air;
- * this immediately causes a rise of insurance expenses;
- * mosquitoes causing malaria can populate new areas thus extending the area where malaria and tropical flue can spread;
- * coral reefs and woods die;
- * by the end of September 2007 it was noticed that the ice covering the north part of the Atlantic Ocean had shrunk by 25 %, by summer 2008 so much of it had melted that the northwest passage and northeast passage opened, so the north pole could be surrounded by ship in open water;
- * the disappearance of the northern sheet of ice is not only terrible because it shows the fast progress of global warming, but also because the old white ice reflected 80 % of the sunrays back into space, whereas the new blue watersurface absorbs 80% of the sun rays;
- * the huge supplies of methane gas until now hidden away in the soil under the coat of ice, now escapes into the atmosphere causing a greenhouse effect much worse than carbon dioxide;
- * new infrastructure has to be developed (due to the rising sea-level);
- * a renowned British economy expert Nicholas Ster, has arrived at the conclusion that sooner or later the change in climate would cause costs amounting to both world wars and the great economy crisis combined;
- * it is generally known, that in spite of its small amount the CO₂ greenhouse gas effectively prevents radiating warmth into space;

- one third of all forms of life on earth may become extinct, if the temperature increases by 2 degrees, an incredible toll on the ecological system of our planet, even endangering mankind's survival;
- global warming endangers the water supplies of the big cities (i.e. the water supplies of Sidney will only suffice for another 2 years, because during the past 2 years only 45 % of the usual rainfall had been preserved;
- persistent droughts have led to diminishing the world's grain supplies from 100 days in 1986 to an amount of 40–50 days;
- a collapse of the Amazon region will happen in the years 2050–2070, if the extent of present air pollution is not reduced;

Further factors which add to the burden of air pollution and the energy crisis:

Economic inequality:

- 99% of the earth's energy and generally of all material goods are owned by 30 % of the world's population, whereas the remaining 70 % barely subsists on the remaining 1 %! 1 % of the inhabitants of the United States own a larger fortune than the combined possessions of 95 % of the population there.
- In the meantime more people suffer from hunger than ever before. According to the latest reports (2009) of ONU (FAO) the organization for food and agriculture their number approaches 1 billion 200 millions. That means that every 6th person lacks appropriate quantity and quality food.
- The world's population grows daily by a quarter of a million, the lack of food will cause greater and greater problems year by year.
- The problem of international terrorism.

Rajendra Pachauri, the Indian environment researcher who together with Al Gore received the Nobel prize for peace in 2007 declared that if no radical reforms are stipulated by 2012 the changes to the ecological system will get out of control irrevocably. The NASA scientist James Hansen who was one of the first to draw our attention to the change in climate at the end of the 80s, thinks that we have to stop burning fossil energy resources by 2030, because they pollute the world and will come to an end in the foreseeable future.

The scientist Zsolt Hetesi who comes to the same result as regards possible developments – wars, famines, epidemics, extinction of a large part of mankind, speaks in a well documented manner about the peak oil theory, i.e. the fossil raw materials of the earth having reached their peak in 2008 and 2009, necessarily causing their supply to diminish more and more. Accordingly our complete modern civilization, relying on these energies will suffer dramatic regression – if the use of green energy does not succeed. Since this is very probable, the disappearance of the comforts of civilization will be followed by the disappearance of food supplies. Battles about the resources will ensue, and as always the incredible tensions of mankind will break out in wars once again, followed by epidemics, hunger and death for one third of mankind. Apocalyptic scenarios can be deemed possible for the 21st century. He writes in this context: *For the people of today it is difficult to grasp how critical the situation is, in what difficulties we have put ourselves as a consequence of our life style*

and our efforts to maintain this. Our generation will live to see the collapse of the artificial world, which progresses at increasing speed. If the reader was born after 1960 (s)he has a good chance of seeing his or her life ended by violence, epidemic or hunger.

Today oil supplies 40 % of our electricity i.e. 90 % of our transport fuel. By this we can see that serious disruptions in supply can be expected in the event of a lack of oil. According to his statement, industrial society will end by the year 2030 and the production of energy will go back to the level it was at in 1930, if not further.

The use of renewable green resources (hydrogen, wind and sun) will not solve the problem according to this prognosis. These can only make up 1–2 % of production which is simply inadequate. There is not sufficient time for so much development nor enough traditional energy resources from old sources in order to at least ensure 10 % of current production. Just one example: In Germany we have the largest wind power system in the EU, but the energy derived in this way cannot even cover the growth in energy need. The author states that alternative solutions can cover no more than 10–15 %.

II.

My dear conference-participants, there is no circumventing the question, what has a believer to think of this rather dark yet apparently fully justifiable prognosis. What can the person do who not only knows that the created reality is limited in time, will not last forever, so will perish sooner or later but also believes that according to prophecy he should expect the reality of a new heaven and a new earth. Let's look at the second letter of Peter in which this hope is expressed, despite the very dramatically described *scenario of catastrophes*. In 2Pet 3,10–14, we read the following: *On that day heaven will go up in flames and the elements will turn to ashes*. This is the actual and factual end of the created world, in reality a vision of its ultimate collapse. Is it possible to deal with this perspective in a proper, calm and sober way? Doesn't this end render any effort superfluous right from the very start? The apostle's answer is clear: dealing with this correctly here and now can in no way be superfluous, quite on the contrary, it's an absolute divine command. BECAUSE the end of heaven and the burning of the elements is not the last happening but a penultimate one. We can also apply Bonhoeffer's expression – the ultimate and the penultimate. The last event is the reality of the new heaven and the new earth. Death is the last enemy in the world but not the last word on this world. For this very reason there is scope and purpose for acting here and now. No scenario of catastrophes no matter how realistic it sounds should paralyze man the way the viper's gaze paralyzes the rabbit, for it speaks only about events of reality before the last time. For the last ultimate reality the new heaven and the new earth, which will emerge from the renewing word of the Creator – so even here among those powers that endanger the existence of the old heaven and earth that activity has its place, which with all the powers of the earth *cultivates and keeps*.

In 1Cor 15, Paul, the Apostle, regards it as a huge temptation if man contemplates doom and death when the last curtain of his life falls. Then, indeed, acting doesn't make

much sense and undertaking heroic efforts is also futile to be able to find the right way of acting – that is an action serving human life and God’s glory. Then nothing else remains but this cynical-hedonistic wisdom: *Let’s eat and drink, for tomorrow we’ll be dead*. Behaving in that way you cannot *cultivate and keep* the earth, you cannot nurse and sustain life. Indeed, doom and death as a last horizon don’t commit the believer to anything – he does not accept any responsibility for his life. The references to Peter and Paul then only mean: the horizon of doom and death does not contain a principle of ethics. *But now Christ has been called from the dead* (1 Cor 15,20) and thus he is the first one of the new heaven and the new earth in this world – and this means as a practical consequence, that in the Lord your efforts are not in vain (1 Cor 15, 58). This may seem to be a paradox. The modern consumer’s mentality might think at once, if there is a new one, you don’t have to take care of the old one. It is not that important and you can throw it away in the end. A boy might think: If my stinking rich father has already promised me the new Porsche, why should I take care of my old Mercedes? Once we have lived with the promise of the new heaven and the new earth, aren’t we inclined to regard the old one as being less important and avoid caring for it? We have seen how little this is true for the reflections of the apostles. The perspective of a new heaven and a new earth contains an incontestable command for this very life on earth. Peter doesn’t say this world is going to be doomed anyway, then a new one will come and all that quite independently from you, so it doesn’t matter at all how you live. No, he doesn’t say that at all. He says that even though you will once live in danger of a collapsing world, you have to look further than that, for the collapse is the penultimate and the new creation is the last reality. Something can be concluded from that and it is not apathy, not hedonism, not even despair but holy, blameless life, religiousness and goodness striving for everything that is good and a peaceful life. Hope means the widest possible last horizon, knowing the commitment to correct, good and holy human activity to the last point and that is a source of power for your conviction in every crisis, without which there is no pure spiritual atmosphere. Hope and calm action instead of panic – the biblical-realistic view of the world will always stick to this. Accepting responsibility is found only there, where this hope is alive, where acting is thought to make sense till the last bursting of the world.

So what will our prolonged future be? A way of life offering safety but compared to the comforts and material things of today on a much lower level. Without minimizing these serious problems, the believer is free to say: what then? For ages we have known that you cannot live on comfort and nobody lives on having a lot of possessions! And yet – this *what then?* is not an exclamation of indifference! It does not doubt the fact that we have to stop persistent pollution of the atmosphere and should switch worldwide to using green energy. And even if despite all efforts the pure sources of energy cannot take the place of polluting ones and if the gap between the need for energy and existing energy resources becomes wider and wider, the believer will not accept that people will jump at each other’s throats because their standard of living is sinking drastically. Peter says, that one thing is very important even on the threshold of complete doom: that the day may find us in peace. And

this is a matter of people's attitudes and of the organizations of power led by them. The purity and the pollution of the spiritual or physical atmosphere are most closely connected.

V.E. Frankl (1915–1997) who is after Freud and Adler one of the founders of the so called third school of psychotherapy of Vienna and who stresses very much the healing power of meaningful human activity, writes the following: *The Statue of Liberty has been situated on the east coast of America for a long time. It is time that we erect the Statue of Responsibility on the other side, otherwise we shall be doomed.*

Where there is hope, there is also acceptance of responsibility for the earth, but there is also a willingness for sacrifice. Richard Wurmbrandt who had been tortured in prison for many years during communist times, bears witness to the world loved by God: *The pains have changed my way of thinking fundamentally, they have taken away the yearning for heaven. What pleasure could I derive from sitting pleasantly in heaven, knowing that others suffer on earth and are tortured? I would join those about whom Jesus says, that they would like to return from Abraham's bosom, to be allowed to comfort the suffering souls (Luk 16.26). My desire is that God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Why shouldn't we bring heaven to the earth as Jesus taught us in his prayer? I am longing for an earth full of justice and love, on which the animals live like in paradise, where the lion lives next to the lamb ... I am much more interested in turning the earth into a paradise, rather than getting into the heavenly paradise. This means hard battle against the bloody dragon and against all the other figures of the apocalyptic monster (Rev 12,3).*

The Christian knows: he is interested in changing the earth into paradise because this earth is not only nature but creature and he is not a top beast of prey in the big circle of nature, but he is a son – a child of God's creation. He who loves God like his own father, also loves the created world – without idolizing himself or part of earth's reality. Indeed, such a person is interested in creating paradise on earth but one without being overcome by the fanaticism of those political adventurers who – i.e. in the past century – wanted to change the earth to paradise, even by fire and sword and only turned it into a hell. The believer works for this paradise on earth, although he knows, that it is not he who creates the new heaven and the new earth, but he receives it as a gift, just like he received the old one as a gift in order to look after it. The Christian churches and communities should not stop this service of warning, which is not at all popular: the crisis of human guilt is much deeper than the oil crisis, in a sense the latter is a consequence, a symptom of the first.

However, sin, which brings disaster on life has other symptoms as well. Even in comfortable living conditions there is much unkindness, lies, unfaithfulness, violence deceitfulness, cynical egoism crushing the human face, created in God's image. Such experiences would make each of us feel that the earth is not a place where you can live.

Only he who loves and is loved, who is just and meets justice himself, will feel the world is a place where you can live – and where he waits for a new heaven and a new world. Such a person is interested in fighting for the purity of the ecological-economic, demographic atmosphere. But if he is not loved and he doesn't love as well, if he suffers injustice and does wrong himself, he lives – even though he doesn't talk about it – like someone whose heart says, stop, it is enough, the world shall perish.

The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann justly claims that the rebirth of life brings forth an immeasurable positive attitude towards life in spite of violence and guilt, failures and disappointments ... *We also may begin with our love for life with God's love which we experience through the Holy Spirit. And God's love is more powerful than human love, which is suffocated more and more by disappointments and illnesses.*

Today Peter, the Apostle would say something like: I don't have gold or oil, but what I have I'll give to you: the energy of the spirit wind, of whom you don't know from where it comes and where it blows, but can give new life to this deformed world. In concrete terms: in the realm of eternal hope those deeds prove to be meaningful, the standards for which may be no other command than the command of love and not the violent homo homini lupus instinct, even though the time of the last bang had already arrived. To do this, mankind has to turn back from much spiritual ado and aberration to the attitude that Calvin teaches in the Catechism of Geneva:

- *What is the very purpose of human life?*
- *The knowledge of God.*
- *Why do you say that?*
- *Because he created us and placed us in the world, to be glorified by us.*
- *And this is reason enough,*
- *That we regard our life as a service to his glory,*
- *Having its source in him.*
- *And what is the highest possession of man?*
- *Just this same knowledge of God.*
- *Why do you call it the highest possession?*
- *Because without it our live would be more miserable than that of animals.*
- *This shows sufficiently, that no greater disaster can happen to mankind than that of living without God.*
- *Right!*

This exclusive concentration on God's glory is not a sign of passiveness concerning people and definitely not a re-cultivation of evil, aimed at mankind. On the contrary, exactly this is the basic interest of mankind. But God's glory as an absolute purpose can not be realized other than through the service of man's life – representing a relative aim. The expressions of absolute-relative take on the meaning, that man and his world are always the direction, addressee of ethical deeds but not their reason – for if he had been the reason, we would never be able to break the vicious circle of the Talio command. But we have to step out of it, it is like that, we men are God's utopia. A chassidic scholar of the scriptures writes: *At the end of each day of creation we can read: „God saw, that it was good.“ After the creation of man it was not there. Because – that was his answer – because man had been created for an open system, sot hat he can grow and develop, which means that he was unfinished, unlike the other creatures.* This provides the certainty that human life has a purpose but at the same time facing us with the open question: God's hope which he bestowed on us, we may be able to fulfill .. and: can we return it?