



Speech by Fr Erny Gillen, Vice President of Caritas Europa at the UNFCCC summit in Copenhagen.

Why should people take part in the debate about climate justice? Not because they have better solutions to a technical problem! Not because they want to impose their views on other believers or non believers. Not because they are part of the civil society. Not because they have access to an extraterrestrial wisdom or knowledge.

People of faith share the “human condition” (la condition humaine) with all other people living on earth – now and in the past; now and in the future. People trust reality.

People of faith feel rooted in a bigger project where they are not the architect of the master plan but contributors and co-architects of this master plan.

Christian and Jewish people for instance express this trust with the concept of “creation”. Within a Christian format, the life force of our being within the whole creation is not an anonymous force or natural law. It is a person who wants this Earth to be. It is a person who wants this humankind to be. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI went back to these roots of everything and everybody by recalling this person, this force, this inner logic of creation is simply “love”.

You know that the concept of creation is nowadays very much discussed within the modern world and within theology. Some theologians are putting a high emphasis on the logic behind the scene and underestimate what today we call self-determination or simply “freedom”. Others are putting emphasis on the “Crown of Creation”.

I propose to have a look at one of the most famous expressions of art in relation to creation. You all know Michael Angelo’s picture within the Sistine Chapel in Rome. This picture illustrates the friendship between God and the human person. It illustrates distance and closeness. In a Christian anthropology, God and the human being are not separated: they are deeply



interrelated and open to one another. We are living in his love. And we are talking to him or her, our Creator, when we pray with words or without words. Our transcendence is our specificity. We can look beyond our actual needs. We can plan. We can dream. We can make history. This means that the human person has a specific role in the plan of God, in the plan of the creation to which we belong and which conditions our development.

As Crown of the Creation, the human person is invested with freedom – for good and for evil. That's exactly the price of freedom. You can't have freedom without any risk. And this conference here in Copenhagen is about the risks and the opportunities of human freedom. Yes we can! Yes we ought! A moral framework is needed for humankind because of it is freedom. Animals do not need to have parliamentary debates about their future. They are so deeply rooted in the system that they will evolve with the system and in the system of creation – or if you prefer to call it biology or physics. We humans left that paradise of "No decision necessary". We left the world without risks. Wars and bloodshed are and were the consequences as well as technological progress and prosperity. Today, the climate debate shows that we belong nevertheless to the nature of this Earth. And as we do not believe this spiritually anymore, we have to "feel" it, to touch it. Climate becomes such a focus where we can – as human beings – no longer deny that we belong to a bigger environment. We become so strong and powerful that we are able to threaten our natural host – the Earth and its climate.

People of faith are still living their connectivity to the Creator. As free people they choose to believe in God. They are cultivating this relation to their origin in rites and celebrations. Religious people know as well that religion does not bind an individual to a divine reality. They know that community is key to life as people of faith. Framing the religious need of people in Catholic or Christian terms, in Islamic or Jewish pictures and rites, in Buddhist behavior is a cultural progress which paved the way to human history.



Human history is our new world we live in. We do not live simply as pure nature. We make history our context and our framework.

In religious books, the struggle between the freedom of mankind and the will of God is omnipresent. Therefore, revelation is so important. I'm talking about God's message to the world. God wants men and women as free persons, not as puppets. Noah's Ark is one generous picture for that Revelation. God even made himself human in Jesus Christ who we are waiting for in this time of advent.

In our Caritas publication, *Climate Justice: Seeking a new global ethic*, you will find six keywords for an ethical framework designed within Christian theology and Catholic Social Teaching.

Let's become concrete: Who will destroy the Earth? George Monbiot answers: the poor will not destroy the planet.

Today my dear friend, and in the old times it was always the powerful who wrote history and made their lifestyle the framework for all. In the Bible, we find hundreds of stories and indications about the will of God – as the creator of all men and women, as the creator of each and everyone. He stands on the side of the poor. Exclusion and murder cannot be done in his name. He is a God for all. If today Universalism in philosophy and within ethics has become a common place, it is certainly due to that theological evidence. Prophets of all times advocated for the poor. Not because they find the poor especially attractive, but because the marginalized are signs that something in the history of men is going wrong. Those who have the power to build history are doing it often – all too often – at the cost of poor people. This mechanism of building one's own prosperity on the shoulders of other people, of poor people is at the centre of the biblical drama about a just world for all. This mechanism of building one's own future at the cost of others is at the center of this conference. If the murdered Bishop Oscar Romero and the murdered Jesuit pries Ignacio Ellacuria were talking about "a civilization of poverty" or "a



civilization of the poor”, they did not want to reduce all prosperity to poverty. But they appealed for justice.

Every person should have the right to development. This right to development cannot be usurped by the rich ones. Therefore we need global commitments as the one which is negotiated here in Copenhagen. We need a world authority as Pope Benedict states. We need a new human ecology. The civilization of poverty was explained as “live simply” or as a civilization of shared frugality by Jon Sobrino. If this language hurts some of you, because it is straightforward, you can go for the German philosopher Immanuel Kant who says in his categorical imperative the same. Do not use any other person as a mean. This principle explains what equality and human dignity are all about. We are equals – now and in the future. We are responsible for our brothers and sisters – here and elsewhere, today and tomorrow. This new philosophy was elaborated by the Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas, when he enlarged the principle responsibility to all consequences human behaviour has.

Today we the people of the Earth are living in nature. By leaving nature, we are building culture as our new natural world. The footprints of this culture as well as our political and ethical projects are the fixed points of history.

We are living in two circles: the circle of nature and the circle of history. Both are interrelated and are interacting.

Today our history is eating the future of tomorrow’s generation. We know this. We are free to change it – or to sacrifice the future on the altar of our consumerist life and living style.

Let me come to a simple and religious conclusion:

The Copenhagen leitmotiv says: “we have the power to save the world.” If we understand this sentence in a pure technical way, we misunderstand the message. We will not have to invent new rockets or new medications to repair climate. We have the power to change our lifestyles now!

