

## Climate Warming: the present Original Sin ?

1.

The concept of original sin, in traditional Christian theology, is said to be a sin communicated by propagation to the whole of humanity by the first parents Adam and Eve. The progeny of Adam and Eve are not responsible for their original sin, but bear some of its consequences as the human inclination to sinfulness such as greed, selfishness and violence. Original sin was reflected in the individual behavior. The Church teaching had a solution for this alienation from the will of God in the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism.

Medieval Christian theology developed the concept of Jesus offering a redemptive sacrifice of his life, making amends for human sinfulness. (cf. St. Anselm :Cur Deus Homo?) This interpretation of Jesus life and death as atonement to the Father was a distortion of the life story and core teaching of Jesus of God as love, and His chief commandment of love of neighbor. This was an alienation of Christology that has come down to our times as the main leitmotif of a spirituality emphasizing charity and neglecting social justice.

2.

Since the 1960's there has been given more attention in theology for a reinterpretation of original sin, related to the structural problems and situations in which all are borne and part of as victims and actors. We see interpretations of original sin as the structural sins of domination and oppression, and the unwillingness to deal with these structures.

I have developed myself a reinterpretation of original sin, referring to the sin of capitalism, colonialism and of the imperialism of modern times. This "sin" was mainly the conquest of weaker peoples by the more advanced (European) powers after 1492. Thereafter the colonial powers set up the world order that prevailed from 1492 to at least 1945. Some of its characteristics continue even after the independence of the former colonies. The present inheritors of the advantages of the colonial system of the past centuries- many European peoples- are not responsible for the situation of colonial exploitation, even though they benefit from it.

As the colonized countries developed as part of the modern world system, there grew up a local elite that collaborated with the exploiting colonizers. There were also internal problems within the colonies such as of ethnic relations of majority and minority communities as in Sri Lanka specially after Independence in 1948 and three decades of internal civil conflict till March 2009.

Obvious is the lack of direct responsibility of the beneficiaries for the inequity of the prevailing social system or world order. But in any case there is an advantage for the Christians and Western peoples. There is an advantage mainly for the Euro-American peoples in migration to open land spaces, and hence land ownership of colonies, called "terra nullius" like a gift of creation, and correspondingly access to natural resources, even when these were limited and not

renewable. There were positive aspects of Western colonialism such as development of the modern education and health services and the introduction of democratic forms of government.

The Afro Asian peoples were subject to the imperialist systems set up by the European, North American and Japanese empires.

3.

A third type of original sin can be seen in the present Climate warming and its consequences on the mainly poorer peoples of the world. The main human agents who helped to bring about the warming of the earth's climate in the past two to three centuries are the industrializing countries, the modern colonizer countries using the energy derived from fossil fuels. They have developed technologies of mechanized production, motor transportation, domestic warming and cooking that depend on burning oils that generate CO<sub>2</sub> and related emissions called green house gases.

The developed peoples, including third world elites, have adopted a life style that cannot be spread to the whole world due to limitation of resources.

Some of the consequences of climate warming have been described by James Pender, a climate change expert writing in the USPG, Anglicans in WorldMission Autumn 2009: "There will be less rainfall for crops, heavier monsoons, flooding due to rising sea levels and more cyclones. This will have a serious impact on health. Insects will thrive, which means more disease; drinking water will become salty, and there will be smaller harvest, which means malnutrition."

Dr Ahsan Uddin Ahmed, executive director of the Centre for Global Change, said: "We have evidence of climate change. Records of rainfall and temperature of 50 years showed that night temperature in winter rose and the duration of winter shrunk. Rainfall in September and October

"An estimated 800 million people in developing Asia currently have no access to basic electricity services and some 1.8 billion people must rely on traditional biomass fuels to meet their cooking and heating needs." (Daily Mirror, 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2010 p.B 3.

China and India are nations that cause considerably high emissions of green house gases as their total contribution to climate warming due to their high population, but their per capita impact on climate warming is relatively very low due to the poverty of their populations. To improve their standard of living they have to modernize their economies. The rich developed countries want China and India to reduce their impact on global warming, but they insist on an equitable standard of living for their poor peoples.

On the other hand the highly developed countries want to maintain their standard of living and place in the global economy. Thus North Americans have a private motor car for each adult, and travel very long distances by private car. They want to keep up their industrial production and ensure a future supply of petroleum, if need be by armed

The impact of climate warming is already being felt in the occurrence of earthslides, floods and melting of glaciers.

Earthquakes occurred in Haiti this year killing about 200,000 persons, the same happened in Indonesia and China. Volcanoes erupting as in the Arctic 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> April 2010 are said to have impact on growing pollution. Is the earth taking revenge of the way we exploit her?

The present distribution of population to land as in China and India will if continued as at present lead to widespread deaths due to malnutrition. Recently 200,000 farmers in India committed suicide due to frustration with crop failures. Here we experience the connection between the second and third type of original sin.

4.

Need for a World authority

The two original sins of colonizing capitalism and iniquitous climate warming pose problems the world as a whole must solve. But there is no world authority that can bring the 200 or so sovereign states together to agree to a solution for the common good of all peoples. As independent nation states they tend to act in their self interest, without due regard for the interests of the whole planet. International negotiations on climate change did not arrive at an agreement among them concerning a solution that all accept and benefit all. Different meetings as at Bali, Kyoto, and Copenhagen lead to no legally binding agreement among all the nations.

There has to be a radical reform of United Nations Organization if it is to bring about justice in global climate policy. The problems of climate change are a new phenomenon in human consciousness in international relations. The factors which give rise to climate warming (or cooling) cannot be controlled by warfare or mere military power. The industrially and economically developed countries have been the main contributors to climate warming due to their methods of industrial production which imply more emission of green house gases that cause the climate warming and pollution of the atmosphere of land, water and air.

Global policies concerning climate warming have to help poor countries to develop economically without adding to climate warming and can contribute in their own policies by changes in life style and eating habits such a consumption of more vegetables and green leaves.

Maintaining standard of living of developed countries is no longer possible , urban planning is necessary and population migration to more open spaces.

Positive Global Remedies to climate warming need to be taken.

Humanity has reached a new stage in its journey on planet Earth. Climate warming poses new and serious problems that demand global action by the world's peoples together.

1) Poor countries can be helped to mitigate climate warming by technologies that reduce emission of green house gases.

2) Reforestation of the earth can be developed by agreed international policies as in the more open spaces in South America.

3) adopting simple life styles and eating habits such as consumption of more vegetables, fruits and green leaves.

4) overcoming the pan- epidemic of HIV/AIDS, specially in Africa.

5) better urban planning, reducing slums,

6) providing cheap public transportation countrywise

7) population migration to more open spaces as in the Americas and Oceania

8) maintaining standard of living of developed countries adapting better technologies

9) care of nature, animals, fish

10) public health care, indigenous medicines, sharing state pharmaceutical products

Could we therefore suggest the setting up of a UNO Commission that works on two levels:

- a) on impact of colonialism globally from 1492 – 1945 and seeks for a redistribution of land and population in order to deal with the big gap between rich and poor on the planet.
- b) on impact of climate warming since industrial revolution and on advantages for different countries and cost to others.

5.

Can the religions inspire the required changes to meet the on coming global emergency? The religions together have a core of spiritual values that can inspire the care for neighbor and nature that the religions advocate. But the rituals of the religions do not give a common message to meet the global needs.

The World's Religions can work together for the common good of humanity, to save human lives, and planet earth. They can inspire the required changes to meet the on coming global emergency

Christianity has a special responsibility due to encouraging the spread of Empire from Roman times, and the colonial empires since 1492. Christian peoples must be prepared to share their lands with the peoples of Asia and Africa, who will face the heaviest pressure for migration. The old laws of citizenship can no longer serve human needs. What would be the meaning of "sharing bread so that no one is in need" as in the Acts of the Apostles. How is the weekly Eucharist to be understood in the face of climate warming and the future challenges as of droughts, cyclones, sea level rising, shortage of water? What would the Christian catechesis, pastorate in the coming decades be? How would formation of leadership be?

Religions may have an impact on acceptance of new migrants, by encouraging just population planning and just use of arable land and resources for industry.

Religions can work together for the common good of humanity, to save human lives, and planet earth.

to counteract human action that generates undesirable climate warming in different parts of the world.

T. Balasuriya 2010