

BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON CLIMATE CHANGES OR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Rom. 8.18-23

Romans 8 is one of my favorite new Testament text. During my student time, 45 years ago now, I did my Exegesis Paper on Romans 8.18-23 not knowing exactly what it would mean today. Romans 8 has got 3 theological elements that move my more and more as grow up and two with which I do not agree with St. Paul's view or interpretation. So I start by sharing with you these 3 good theologies and 2 bad theologies:

1. The teaching about life in Spirit. The Spirit which sets free, gives life, removes fear, gives courage and power of the evil. The Spirit which makes rely on God and Father and Mother. This gives me much strength personally (8.1-17)
2. The recognition of the pain and pending decay, danger and destruction of our planet and life of all kinds and the great and glorious hope of freedom from this danger. And it is here where everyone of us can wonderfully play a role with small actions. (8.18-28). We are in pain but there is still a window of hope.
3. The third part of good theology is expressed through the victory song (8.31-39). We can be resilient to all that cause pain and at the end there is a celebration of victory because of the one who loves us and loves the planet – God our Creator and his Christ. Who would not like to be a conqueror and hero together with Christ?

Two bad theologies of St. Paul which I do not agree with:

1. Creation is condemned to decay because God wanted it to be so. If God created nature with such a complex integrity, energy, life, riches and beauty how can He condemn it to decay, pain and destruction? If we believe that it is God who causes climate changes and decay we are saying He is not a serious God. I think we are not serious creatures and we are not obedient children of our Father/Mother God. We don't even recognize creation as our senior brother or sister created by God.
2. I do not agree with the predestination theology in verse 29-30 because I believe that everyone and every living thing created by God was created in love and God gave equal opportunity of integrity and salvation except that we human beings make the wrong choices. We are all and with all creation destined to share in the glory of God.

19. "All creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal His sons. For creation was condemned to lose its purpose, not of its own will, but because God willed it to be so (actually not God but rather, man, by greed and ignorance willed it to be so). Yet there was hope that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God. But we know that up to the present time creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth. But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit ...also groan within ourselves as we wait for God ... to set our whole being free..."

Now coming to our text I just want to make very few comments of my understanding of the meaning, the challenges and hopes as we grapple with the question what to do to address the climate changes. Can we contribute to challenge of setting our planet free from pain and decay?

1. Verse 18. St. Paul's vision cast before us the image that after the pain and danger human species and all creation is going through there will be a kind of glory incomparable. There is pain, groaning and decay. There must be an act of salvaging and freeing both people and nature. Then there is a glorious future and we have a planet and life which supersedes what we have and what we know.
The questions which the scripture silently poses to us are: do you know what saving and freeing actions you can perform to do your part of renewing the health of creation?

2. On verse 19 please note the wait of the expression: *All creation waits with eager longing* for the revelation of the sons of God. To me these words clearly tell me that creation is ready for a good change, but that change depends on the appearance of the sons and daughters of God. If in our communities there are no people understanding and joining the efforts to recreate nature, then nothing will happen. But if we succeed to get as men people to care the creation, people who know that the climate needs to be treated with justice. Then the change, the salvaging of creation will happen without delay because nature is generous and ready for recovery.
3. Verse 20 says that the creation was condemned to decay not by its own will, but God willed it to be so. Our present experience is that the pain and decay of the integrity of creation does not come from God. It is man made and we can name people, companies and specific countries. The question here is how do we make people to accept the blame, see the danger and want to save the creation for the future generation? How do we change people and systems from greed to generosity?
4. In verse 22 St. Paul paints the climate change consequences very powerfully and uses words such as the creation groaning, and going through childbearing pain. The deadly cyclones, hurricanes, storms, flooding, draughts, erosion, increase of sea level water, earthquakes, fires, deforestations and desertification, the worming of the planet symbolize that groaning with childbearing pains is a naked reality. And nature will not forgive us except if we assist the planet to deliver new life. The child bearing pain is one that carries hope and better future. With the birth of a child there is hope and joy.
5. In verse 23 Paul also speaks with a far-reaching vision of our times and beyond. The pain, decay and danger facing our planet puts human species in the verge of a catastrophe. Coronavirus pandemic is a true apocalyptic symbol.
6. The final question is how do we engage ourselves and how do we engage other people.

Lets end where we started.

Lets lead a life in Spirit because it gives us new life and courage.

The reality of climate changes is not to be neglected because it is serious and keeps shifting so much that there is no safer country. The danger is coming closer everyday.

Nature itself promises recovery if we give it time and help. There is hope and we can do our part.

Bp. Carlos S Matsinhe

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