

Responsible to God: Christian and Muslim Perspectives on Biotechnology and Bioethics for the Common Good

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1. Bioethical Challenges for Religions and Interreligious Cooperation

Biotechnological progress especially in the medical and health sector, but also in agriculture and food production, water management, climate adaptation, weapons development, new material, environmental technologies lead to manifold worldwide hopes and fears. The applications range from genetic engineering to nano-biotechnology, from cloning to anti-ageing products, from stem cell research to eugenics, from biological weapons to environmental solutions, from disease treatment to human, animal and plants enhancement. Each technology includes ethical challenges. But many actors, especially religious institutions and voices, see the field of biotechnologies as more sensitive than new technologies in the field of energy, infrastructure, construction or information and communication, even though such technologies have often a greater impact on human and non human life than biotechnologies!

Biotechnologies are especially sensitive because they not only indirectly influence life, health, wealth, development and communities, but they directly impact the beginning, continuation and end of life. That is one reason why religions around the world feel especially challenged to take position: because it affects life and death, religious beliefs of God as creator and sustainer of life, the life beyond death, human life created in the image of God (and therefore the human body as the habitation of God) and the responsibility of human beings as creators towards the creator.

Bioethics is a uniting and a separating theme within and between religions. In both cases it is an important issue for interreligious dialogue and cooperation, especially in today's interdependent, globalised world where people with different religious backgrounds get treatment in the same hospital or live in the same elderly home, build research teams in multinational pharmaceutical companies and sit in governmental ethics committees, have to take regulatory decisions in parliaments or agree on declarations and codes in UN-institutions such as Unesco with its "Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights"¹.

From the broad theme "Religions and bioethics"², the following contribution concentrates on Christian positions with some links to Islam and Judaism as the other main Abrahamic religions. It starts with the diversity of methodologies to interpret Holy Scriptures (point 2) and to select themes (point 3). I then develop the Christian anthropology of being a "guest on earth" which is a common fundament of the three Abrahamic religions (point 4). This leads to the ethics of responsibility: human beings as "careholders",

¹ Ten Have, Henk A.M./Michèle S. Jean, The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. Background, principles and application, Paris: Unesco Publishing 2009, 355-366.

² From the broad literature see *Religionen und Bioethik*. Lexikon der Bioethik, vol. 3, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998, 183-200 (articles on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam). See also various encyclopedias on bioethics.

caring for the common good (point 5). This is the general ethical frame for ten ethical criteria to handle bioethical and biotechnological challenges (point 6).

2. Typology of Theological Methodologies for Bioethics

Three main approaches to ethics and values can be distinguished: *Philosophical* ethics as applied philosophy is mainly based on reason and human experience. After enlightenment, this perspective is often explicitly non-religious, secular, or even anti-religious, laicist. The *cultural* approach refers to cultural traditions and norms. *Religious* ethics is based on worldviews which see human and other life integrated in a holistic horizon of meaning, of personal and collective processes of salvation and/or cosmic laws. All religious ethics is based on Holy Scriptures (or Holy oral traditions) as source of knowledge and orientation and their answers in bioethics.³

Within the religious approach, two main subcategories can be distinguished: in the *cosmic* approach - especially of the so called Asian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism in forefront - life is seen as part of a cosmic unity and cycle and human life is only part of all life, without a specific position or - e.g. in socially engaged Buddhism - with a specific responsibility. In the *theistic* approach - with the Abrahamic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam⁴ in forefront - God as a person and as creator is the ultimate reference point of orientation. God is life, is the giver and enabler of all life. Human beings, made in God's image, have a specific role and responsibility to play in the world. The Abrahamic religions share the methodological premise that God's will - as it is revealed in the Bible and the Qu'ran - is the ultimate criterium for ethical decisions. This common premise cannot be underestimated in its meaning. It should be seen as more important than the differences within and between these religions. This is the common ground for the positions on bioethics as we will see later.

But on the fundament of this common premise, there are substantial methodological differences which then lead to harsh debates and struggles within and between these religions. The main difference is in the different methods of interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, the exegesis and hermeneutics. How can texts, seen as revelation from God, but written by human beings in ancient times, become relevant today and tomorrow in political, economic, scientific, environmental and human contexts which are so different from the time of origin of the Holy Scriptures. This is the challenge and task of theology in general and of ethics in a specific way.

In the theistic (and to some extent in the cosmic) approach, *four main methodological positions* in dealing with the Holy Scriptures can be distinguished:

Fundamentalist positions: "Fundamentalism can be defined as a religious or political movement or attitude with a strict adherence to a set of principles, based on a literal, not adapted interpretation, especially as a return to former principles."⁵ The literal interpretation of the Holy Scriptures claims that no contextual interpretation is needed and possible. Literal reading, even though often only literal in those verses which coincide with the specific, closed world view and ideological system, are often linked with political interests and power structures for which fundamentalists give religious, I would call it

³ A short comparison of the Abrahamic religions and Hindu tradition on bioethics can be found from an Indian catholic perspective in Kanniyakonil, Scaria, *The Fundamentals of bioethics. Legal Perspectives and Ethical Approaches*, Kottayam: Oriental Institute, 2007, 329-351.

⁴ For an overview: Shomali, Mohamad Ali, *Islamic Bioethics: a General Scheme*, *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine*, 2008 1:1, 1-8.

⁵ Christoph Stückelberger, Introduction, in Stückelberger, Christoph/ Hadsell, Heidi (eds.): *Overcoming Fundamentalism. Ethical Responses from Five Continents*, *Globethics.net Series 2*, 2009, Geneva: Globethics.net, 11. Download for free: www.globethics.net/web/guest/library.

ideological⁶, justifications. Such fundamentalism exists in all religions and confessional families within religions. In Christianity, there are protestant fundamentalists e.g. in North America, but also Catholic and Orthodox fundamentalists in various parts of the world.

Orthodox positions: They are faithful to the Holy Scriptures and especially to doctrine and tradition. They accept limited space of interpretation, mainly where there is no clear indication in the Holy Scripture and tradition, e.g. about new technologies and challenges.⁷ Such positions exist in all religions and confessional families within religions, also in all Christian denominations⁸ on all continents, but especially in church hierarchy in the Roman Catholic Church, in Orthodox churches in Eastern Europe and in evangelical traditions on all continents.

Reformist positions: They look for translation, contextualization and inculturation of the word of God in today's context. They therefore reconcile tradition and modernity in order to make faith-based ethics meaningful for new challenges. These positions exist in all religions⁹ and confessional families within religions and in all Christian denominations, but mainly in protestant¹⁰ and some catholic traditions on all continents.

Liberal positions: They are open and positive to modernity, emphasize moral autonomy of scientific research, freedom of research and economic development. Self-responsibility of the individual believer with his/her conscience and direct dialogue with God is of higher importance than obedience to the tradition. The Holy Scriptures give more a general frame than concrete guidelines. These positions exist in all religions and confessional families within religions and in all Christian denominations, but mainly in some protestant churches in Europe and North America.

An ecumenical bibliography of official positions of Christian churches, established by the World Council of Churches¹¹ shows the broad variety of church-positions where at least the orthodox, reformist and liberal positions can be found.

3. Christian/Islamic Themes in Bioethics and Biotechnologies

Christian bioethics (related to biotechnologies) is mainly dealing with *three clusters of themes*. In all of them, but especially in cluster A), ethical reflection of scientific research is emphasized:

A) Human life (medical ethics):

⁶ Ideology in the sense of a world view which simplifies and manipulates the perception of reality and value systems (Holy scriptures) in order to justify specific one-sided interests and actions.

⁷ Breck, John, *The Sacred Gift of Life. Orthodox Christianity and Bioethics*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000; Église et bioéthique. La raison de la science et la raison de la religion, Éditions du Centre Orthodoxe du Patriarcat œcuménique Chambésy/Suisse, 2008.

⁸ Engelhardt Jr., H. Tristram, *Moral Pluralism, the Crisis of Secular Bioethics, and the Divisive Character of Christian Bioethics: Taking the Culture Wars Seriously*, *Christian Bioethics*, 15 (3), 2009, 234-253; Iltis, Ana S., *The Failed Search for the Neutral in the Secular: Public Bioethics in the Face of the Culture Wars*, *Christian Bioethics*, 15 (3), 2009, 220-233.

⁹ For Islamic Bioethics see e.g. Ramadan, Tariq, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, part IV, case study on Islamic ethics and medicine.

¹⁰ Hübner, Jürgen/ von Schubert, Hartwig von (eds.), *Biotechnologie und evangelische Ethik. Die Internationale Diskussion*, Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1992.

¹¹ World Council of Churches, *Member Churches' Official Statements or Documents on Bioethics and Biotechnology (as of 2004. Bibliography)*, download from Globethics.net online library: http://www.globethics.net/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=14538&folderId=1369829&name=DLFE-4228.pdf

Beginning of life: procreation, abortion, in vitro fertilization and stem cell research are main themes of religious bioethics.¹² A typical orthodox position says: “Personhood is conferred by God, and not by physiological development, medical analysis or social convention. ‘Know that the Lord is God! It is he who made us, and not we ourselves.’ (Ps 99:3)”¹³

Enhancement and duration of life: (bio-)medical technologies and treatment for prolongation of life, the divine providence, anti-aging technologies etc.¹⁴

End of life: passive and active euthanasia, pastoral care, palliative care etc.¹⁵

B) Agriculture, Health, Environment

Food/water and biotechnology: positive or negative impact on food production, agriculture, water availability etc. Christian, especially the World Council of Churches¹⁶ and protestant development agencies¹⁷, churches in developing and emerging countries, continental and global ecumenical institutions are engaged in it.

Health and biotechnology: effects on nutrition, health, well-being etc.

Environment and biotechnology: effects on climate, on biodiversity, on cultural and religious rites and traditions etc.

C) Economic, political, legal and leadership aspects

Patenting life: ownership of life, domination and autonomy, legal restrictions and participation etc.

Gender and biotechnology: influence of biotechnologies on women, men and children, gender justice etc.

Economy and biotechnology: bioethics and trade¹⁸, fair prices, benefit sharing, bio-piracy, economic criminality, corruption¹⁹, organ trading etc.

¹² The beginning of life, abortion, in-vitro fertilization and stem cell research are the most controversial bioethical themes, where most of catholic and orthodox churches tend to orthodox positions and protestant churches to rather reformist or liberal positions. See the catholic-protestant dialogue between Cardinal Koch, now head of the Vatican Council for the Unity of Churches, and the author: Koch, Kurt/ Stückelberger, Christoph, Un enjeu et un défi pour les Églises, in Putallaz, François-Xyvier/Salamolard, Michel (dir.), *Le Sens de l'homme. Au cœur de la bioéthique*, St. Maurice : éditions saint-augustin, 2006, 215-250.

¹³ Breck, 2000, 149.

¹⁴ See e.g. the Islamic perspective on the human body: Aramesh, Kiarash, *The Ownership of Human Body: An Islamic Perspective*, Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine, 2009, 2:4, 1-4.

¹⁵ Bülow, Hans-Henrik et al, The world's major religions' points of view on end-of-life decisions in the intensive care unit, *Intensive Care Med* (2008), 34:423-430. For a Jewish position on Terminal Care and Euthanasia see Barilan, Y. Michael, *Revisiting the Problem of Jewish Bioethics: The Case of Terminal Care*, Kennedy Institute for Ethics Journal, Vol 13, No 2, June 2003, 141-168.

¹⁶ World Council of Churches WCC, *Ethical Considerations on Gene Technology for Food and Agriculture*, statement 2003, download from www.globethics.net/web/guest/overall-search; Swiss Ethics Committee on Non-Human Gene Technology ECNH: *Gene Technology for Food*, Bern: ECNH, 2003.

¹⁷ E.g. Christian Aid in Great Britain, Bread for the World in Germany and the catholic agency Caritas Internationalis.

¹⁸ Stückelberger, Christoph: *Global Trade Ethics. An Illustrated Overview*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002, 180ff.

¹⁹ Stückelberger, Christoph, *Corruption-Free Churches are Possible. Experiences, Values and Solutions*,

Political and legal frame and biotechnologies: rules and legislation of biotechnologies, constitution and role of national bioethics committee, risks of biotechnology in failing states or weak state of law, legal and illegal tests, not-informed consent, implementation and monitoring of international conventions etc.

Decision making structures and Leadership: the leadership responsibility of researchers and decision makers in biotechnological innovation etc.²⁰

It can be observed, that Christian statements of researchers, churches or church-related institutions are mainly concentrated on cluster A). Especially the fundamentalist and orthodox positions concentrate on it, often in a combative way. They get media coverage, especially in secular contexts. Cluster B) is also of importance, but more from the side of reformist and sometimes liberal positions, and especially emphasized by Christian development organizations and emergency agencies. They are taken seriously on political and economic level, but are less reported in the media. Cluster C) is not so much in the forefront of Christian statements – except the debate on “patenting of life”. In my view, the economic and political aspects, including economic criminality, are underestimated in its importance and should become more often a subject of research – even in interreligious perspective, since all Abrahamic religions have clear values and norms against economic criminal acts such as bio-piracy or illegal organ trading.

4. “Welcome as Guests on Earth” - “In the Name of God”

“In the name of God” is the profound motto of this conference. What is the consequence of this sentence which is common to the three Abrahamic religions? My proposal for the anthropological foundation of Bioethics is that God invites human beings: “You are welcome as guests on Earth!” All human beings are guests on earth. And they are welcome as such! “I am a guest on earth, we all together are guests on earth” means: As Iranians, Asians and Europeans, as Americans and Africans, as rich and poor, as socialists and capitalists, as Muslim, Hindu, Christians, Buddhists, Jews etc. – we all are guests on earth. The wonderful natural resources are not our personal possession. They do not belong to us, but they are the common good of humanity, given by the creator to us as His guests for careful use and for future generations. This anthropology is common to all Christian confessions. Pope Benedict, in his latest Encyclical “*Caritas in Veritate*”, expresses it by saying: “Nature expresses a design of love and truth. It is prior to us and it has been given to us by God as the setting for our life.”²¹ The same is said in many ecumenical statements of Churches e.g. on Climate Justice.

“To be a guest on earth” is an anthropology which is deeply rooted in many religious traditions and many cultures. In the biblical books, it is linked to God the creator and human beings as his creation with a specific offer and responsibility. “To be a guest” is a paradigm from the creation story up to Christology and Eschatology:

The message „Bring the earth under your control“ (Gen 1:28) in the younger of the two biblical histories of creation, written in the Babylonian exile 2500 years ago, is well known and often misunderstood as an oppressive position of power of man over nature and thus rejected. However, this „dominium terrae“ is by no means an invitation to the unlimited exploitation of nature. On the contrary, it means that we have responsibility for our environment in the same way as a good king should feel responsible towards his people or as a good steward who takes care of the goods that he has been entrusted with. The older biblical history of creation shows God's generosity of allowing humanity to live on earth like in a fertile

Globethics.net Focus 2, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2010.

²⁰ Stückelberger, Christoph: Bioethische Führungsverantwortung, in Haldemann, Frank et al, *Bioethik im Spannungsfeld der Disziplinen*. Festschrift für Alberto Bondolfi zu seinem 60. Geburtstag, Bern: Peter Lang, 2006, 71-79.

²¹ Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, 2009, no. 48.

garden but combines it with the command „to cultivate and to guard it“²², “to work on it and to take care of it”²³ (Gen 2:15). God’s invitation and limitation “to cultivate and to conserve” is the shortest and oldest definition of sustainability I found!

God's message to mankind - to be respectful to creation - is not only understood from the biblical creation stories. The same respect is expressed in the Qu’ran (e.g. 22:18) as publications on Islamic environmental ethics show. According to the New Testament, at the end of time and already in these times, God invites to the great banquet. He offers the abundant creation to his guests and lets them partake in the completion of creation. Mankind can only respond to this promise and this offer in the most appropriate way by showing joy, praise and thanks. At the same time, this offer represents the foundations of the ethical re-orientation: Because humanity has experienced God's promise it is possible to live on earth like a respectful guest. God himself is host. It is him to prepare the banquet (Is 25:6-8). The laid table is creation in perfection. And it is not up to the guest to choose his or her host, but the host invites his guests as his friends (Jn 15:16).

In the eschatological reconciliation, the mutual hospitality of all creatures becomes perfect: „Wolves will be the guests of sheep“(Is 11:6)! This means that to be God's guest and host of fellow-humans and fellow-creatures is a basic attitude including even the world of non-humans!

The eschatological orientation has to be closely linked to liberation story of the exodus: Guests and hospitality play an essential role in the biblical tradition as well as in many other cultures. In the Old Testament, the respect of foreigners and guests is based upon the memory of the people of Israel in Egypt. „My people went to live in Egypt as foreigners“(Is 52:4). Yet, „do not despise the Egyptians; you once lived in their land“(Deut 23:7; similar: Ex 22:21; Lev 19:34; Deut 24:18). After exodus from Egypt, the people of Israel experienced in the Babylonian exile for the second time what it meant to be foreigners. The attitude - that one's own life as well as the earth and its resources are not our property but only a loan - is closely connected to this (1 Chr 29:1). In ecological terms, psalm 24 is also significant: “The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are his“ (Ps 24:1). Thus, humans have no right of disposal, but a right of use upon the resources of this earth.

„I am a guest on earth for just a little while“ (Ps 119:19) does not mean to long for the beyond while withdrawing from this world, but to enter the pilgrimage on earth in joyful expectation of God's kingdom to come and in deep respect towards creation knowing that we cannot possess it. Who behaves like a true guest, leaves the guesthouse behind in good order for the next guests that will arrive after him/her.

In the gospel books, hospitality plays an eminent role. In particular, in the gospel according to Luke one can truly speak about a theology of being guests.

The table community with guests is the embodiment of hospitality and the anticipation of the eschatological reconciliation - again in particular in the gospel books and with Jesus. The Eucharistic community is an expression of God's hospitality and thus the visible banquet community of the guests that have been invited by God himself (1 Cor 10:16-18); Mk 14:22). The most important feature of the guests that are partaking in the banquet community is the sharing. Thus, the Eucharist turns into the starting point of the worldwide sharing among guests including fellow-beings and the environment. Christian eco-spirituality starts at the table of the Lord! It starts with God’s invitation to all – independent from confession- to become his guest. Finally, the Judeo-Christian image of mankind describes man to be God's guest and as such at the same time also the host of his fellow-beings and the world around him.

Everything that has been created is placed at the guest's disposal, however, cannot be possessed. Hence it follows that things which are on loan are treated with care, respect and sustainability. Every intervention

²² English Bible, Good News Bible.

²³ English Bible, New International Version.

into the 'goods on loan' has to be done with greatest caution and only on consultation with the host. Thus results a 'guest-politics' and a 'guest-economy'.

To be guest means to be protected by the host and feel secure with him. At the same time it means to see the life span on this earth not as the ultimate but as the penultimate goal. The expectation of the coming kingdom of God thoroughly marks life in this world. The hope for another, eternal home leads to calmness and composure, overcoming greed as it is no longer necessary to get hold of the fortunes of this world.

In the same way as God is not only host but also guest himself (and foreigner! Jn 1:11; Mt 8:20), man is not only guest but commissioned by God to take over the tasks of a host. At least from the eschatological perspective not only all fellow-humans but also all fellow-creatures have to be considered as guests. Hence from our ethics of being guests follows the respect of the value and dignity of all creatures. To be host thus also corresponds to the 'diakonos' of the New Testament, who serves the guests unselfishly for example at the banquet community. In management terms it is called servant leadership and good, accountable stewardship. Being host leads to charitable service, to careful use of resources, to diaconal service for human and non-human beings. There is a close connection between the duties of the host towards his guests and the poor.

From this starting point of being guest on earth, the double mission of human beings in the two biblical creation stories appears in a new light. „Bring the earth under your control“(1 Gen 1:28) means to behave even as a king like a guest! What should be brought under control in the dominium are not living creatures but the earth, consequently it means the cultivation of the soil. Christian supports technology and science as far as they are means to cultivate, which means to feed people and improve life in dignity for all. The 'dominium terrae' is replaced by the 'servicium terrae', serving the earth.

This *Eco-Theology of Being Guest* can be summarized with the following key elements:

Eco-theology: God is owner of the guesthouse and host

- God the creator is the owner of the earth: “The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord; the earth (oikoumene) and all who live on it are his.”(Ps 24:1). God offers the Earth as his guesthouse. He himself is the host.
- Human beings together with all non human creatures (!) are no longer enemies on earth, but invited and welcome as guests.
- God in Jesus Christ invites all people to be his guests and friends, to sit at his table and to build one community (humankind).

Eco-anthropology: Human beings are invited guests

- The earth is the common guesthouse, given to all living beings in order to live in dignity on it.
- Guests are invited to enjoy the gifts in the guesthouse and to use them carefully.
- Guests are asked to respect the rules and obligations in the guesthouse.
- Guests should leave the guesthouse in a way that the next guests (future generations) can enjoy the same or similar gifts.
- The guests borrow (rent) the guesthouse, they are not the proprietors!
- One can only be guest in relation to a host or a hostess. Therefore, man cannot determine his being a guest out of himself, but it has been given to him by God's covenant with the people.

Eco-Spirituality: Celebrating the caring and just God

- Being grateful for the abundant life that God offers to all beings leads to the life-long act of

celebrating God for His justice and His care.

- Celebrating the beauty of creation as the image of the beauty of the triune God
- Celebrating God's (eco-) justice in the midst of injustice, praising the Cosmic Christ as the ever-present healing, reconciling and caring energy which enables and empowers human beings – all of us – to care for God's creation.

Eco-Ethics: Acting as responsible guests and 'careholders' in the common household earth

- The Earth is not the possession of individuals, communities or nations. The earth is the common house of humankind (eco comes from the Greek word *oikos*, house). Human responsibility in this common house has three dimensions:
- *Economy* (from *oikos*, *nomos*: the rules in the household): responsible production of goods and services. 'guest-politics' and 'guest-economy' are based on an attitude which uses everything as an entrusted loan and not as a possession.
- *Ecology* (from *oikos*, *logia*: the study of the living in the household): responsible use of natural resources and living together of all living in ecosystems so that future guests can also use them.
- *Ecumenism* (from *oikumene*, the whole inhabited earth): responsible community of different religions and world views as interreligious community cares for creation.

Eco-Technology: acting as responsible scientist/researcher and implementer/user of technologies

- All technologies, including biotechnologies, have to be developed and handled by researchers, implementers and users as guests on earth and "careholders".

In *Islam*, the view of men being guests on earth is similar as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Allah as the owner of the earth and humankind as stewards, the critic of greed and the virtue of modesty are common to all three monotheistic religions.²⁴ "The Islamic model, on the other hand, is based on the uncompromised concept of the oneness (*tawhīd*) of Allah, the Creator and Sustainer, and of His creation's servitude to anything or anyone but Him, denoted by the name *Islam*, which means "submission." The Islamic religion (*dīn*) regulates, through its legal system (*shari'a*), every human action regarding the human relationship towards the Creator, the self, and others. This regulation takes place in recognition of human instincts and needs, not in their suppression. Therefore, *Islam* is not just a religion in the contemporary understanding, but rather a way of life, composed of a set of beliefs ('*aqā'id*) and legal rules or systems derived primarily from the sources of revelation, the *Qur'an*, the stipulations of Islamic teachings and legal rules. Creation may be used responsibly by way of avoiding excessive consumption, waste, oppression, and destruction. Happiness is defined as obtaining the Creator's reward."²⁵

5. Responsibility means to respond to God

Responsibility means to respond, to answer to God's call. The Latin word 'spondere' means 'to give', 'to sponsor'. God sponsors his whole creation so that we as his creatures can have life in its fullness by grace (John 1:16). Human responsibility is the response to these gifts. Today, the Greek word *oikos*, house, is present in three dimensions: *economy*, *ecology* and *ecumenism*: responsible stewards care for the economy as the material basis of life in God's household, the earth; they care for the ecology as the environmental basis of life in God's household; they also care for ecumenism as the spiritual basis for

²⁴ Özdemir, Ibrahim: *An Islamic Perspective on Environmental Ethics*, 2007, online on http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/An_Islamic_Perspective_of_Environmental_Ethics_469.

²⁵ Buzenita, Anke Iman, *Formulating an Islamic Model of Science and Bioethics*, in *Jima*: Vol 41, 2009, 114-121 (115). Download from <http://www.globethics.net/web/guest/overall-search> (22 Jan 2010)

life and its inter-denominational, inter-religious and intercultural community in the global household. The Christian steward, the caring manager, the responsible church leader cares, protects, guides, orders, serves and shares in all these three dimensions of God's house, the earth.

5.1 The responsible Scientist and Manager: From Shareholder to 'Careholder'

Within the family of guests, there are different roles and tasks. A special responsibility²⁶ has the manager who manages the guesthouse on behalf of the owner. In biblical terms, it is described as the good steward as good manager. Its clearest expression is found in Luke 12:42-48:

42 Who then is the faithful and wise steward, 2 whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. 44 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 45 But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful. ... 48 Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

The oikonomos is housekeeper who keeps the house in order. It is the administrator and manager who cares for the economy of the household and for all people living and working in this community. It is the first servant. There are four characteristics in the text which distinguish the responsible and the irresponsible manager.

1. The good manager recognizes that he is not the proprietor of the house or the shareholder of the company but responsible to maintain and develop it in the name of the owner. The bad manager behaves as if he is the owner and sees the house, the earth and its resources or the company as his/her own property.
2. The faithful steward cares for the people under his/her responsibility! He/she gives food, salary and social security at the proper time (v. 42). But the bad leader violates and exploits the people he should be responsible for (v. 45).
3. The good leader represents a solid work ethic. He/she works hard for the well-being of the collaborators and therefore serves as a good example. The irresponsible leader does not work, is corrupt, drunken (that means he is greedy and hooked on all kind of things). His exploitation and slavery is an expression that he regards not only the household but also human beings as his personal property.
4. The wise servant acts in a responsible, accountable way at every moment of his/her life because he/she knows that the 'master' could come and control every time. Business ethics and response to God are fully integrated in the daily life. But the stupid manager believes that no control will happen; that he can win every court case by bribing the judges; that it is enough to go to church and start to pray just at the end of life in order to be saved.²⁷

The story shows in a very simple and convincing way the meaning of responsibility: it means to respond to somebody (the word 'responsibility' comes from 'response'): the manager to the owner, the Christian to God. A bad leader wants to be autonomous, that means 'independent' from all responsibility towards others except himself/herself. And by that, as a drunken person, the manager loses control over himself/herself. He is controlled by his greed for mammon and power. The good steward is theonomous

²⁶ See more in Stückelberger, Christoph/ Mugambi, J.N.K (eds.): *Responsible Leadership. Global and Contextual Perspectives*, Globethics.net Series No. 1, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2007. Download for free from www.globethics.net/web/guest/library.

²⁷ For responsible, corruption-free management of resources see Stückelberger, Christoph: *Corruption-free Churches are Possible. Experiences, Values, Solutions*, Globethics.net Series No 3, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2010. Download for free from Oct 2010 from www.globethics.net/web/guest/library.

which means he gets his responsibility, respect and dignity from his dependency from God. And the more responsible he acts the more responsibilities he gets and can manage (v. 48).

The story in Luke ends with the conclusion: 'From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.' (Luke 12:48) God gives a lot and accordingly he requires accountability. In ethical terms: The size of power and resources to manage must correspond to the size of responsibility. Christians are invited to be God's friends, which includes a lot of trust of God and responsibility of Christians as co-workers of God: 'Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they should be found trustworthy.' (1 Cor. 4:1-2)

This responsible behavior is a vision for everybody, but especially for leaders. This model is convincing because it is not only a theory but a model practiced by Jesus himself in his life as a 'serving king', offering his own life for the benefit and salvation of the whole community. He preached, healed, danced and laughed, constantly responding to the needs of his 'clients' as his 'work ethics'. He served as a servant washing the feet of his disciples, he gave orientation and guidelines by his challenging parables, he shared food. He remained faithful to God whom he called father, even on the cross. The disciples of the resurrected Christ are invited to become such good stewards of God's gifts.

The two models of the faithful steward and the thankful guest can also be summarized in the word 'careholder'. The shareholder holds shares and therefore possesses a part of a company in order to make profit out of his invested money. The responsible shareholder, in addition, cares for the well-being of the company and its workers. The responsible leader as a 'careholder' holds responsibility and cares for values, goods and for people who are entrusted to him or her. Responsible behavior and its virtues are first of all valid for all human beings. Leaders 'only' have a higher degree of responsibility to care than the 'ordinary' people. The stronger has more responsibilities than the weaker because he has more power, competences and means to decide and to act.

The steward and 'careholder' can be characterized by *six virtues: to care, to protect, to guide, to order, to serve, to share.*

5.2 Caring for the Five Protecting "Skins"

Life is vulnerable and is threatened in manifold ways, human life even more than non-human life. Life needs protection. Five levels of „skin“ to protect human life can be distinguished. They correspond to five basic needs:

First "skin": the biological skin of the body;

Second „skin“: the clothes as protection of the body;

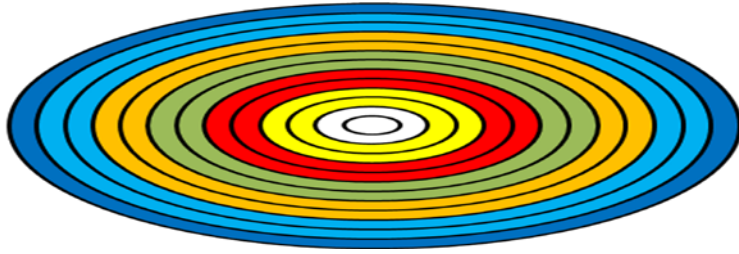
Third "skin": the housing as protection from weather changes and dangers;

Fourth "skin": the community as protection of the individuals;

Fifth „skin“: the atmosphere as the overall "coat" around the globe enabling life on earth. To care for the fifth skin means to be responsible for climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation.

5.3 The Common Good as Common Framework

The notion of the common good is a full respect for both the individual and collective interests of society while at the same time asking the individual to demand less while the community at large concedes some of its power. Responsibility of individuals and institutions means to balance individual and community interests from the perspective of furthering the common good. Careholders care not only and primarily for the own interest against the interests of others, but they care for the common good. The common good includes many levels, from the self to the cosmos:



White: 1 Myself; 2 Inner Family: partner, children;

Yellow: 3 Broader Family, Clan; 4 Professional Community: team;

Red: 5 Neighbourhood: village, quarter; 6 Religious Community: parish/temple/mosque

Green: 7 Peers: sport, ethnic, interest groups; 8 Professional Community: company;

Brown: 9 Nation: state, peoples; 10 Regions;

Blue: 11 All Religions: world spirituality; 12 Humankind: all human beings

Dark Blue: 13 Biosphere: all living beings.

6. Ethical Criteria for Biotechnologies

6.1 Ten ethical criteria

The anthropology of the Abrahamic religions of being invited by God to be a guest on earth leads to the ethics of the human being as a responsible careholder engaged for the common good. This is the fundament for ethical criteria for technologies. *Biotechnologies - as all technologies – are from an ethical point of view positive if they set the priority in meeting the basic human needs of all human beings in order to enable them to live in dignity. They are positive if they promote values such as justice, sustainability, peace, participation and diversity. They are negative, if they hinder them and increase the gap between rich and poor, increase injustice and conflicts, destroy environment, violate the dignity and integrity of human and non human beings and threaten biodiversity.*

According to all three Abrahamic religions Christianity, Islam and Judaism, Human life and non-human life have to be protected in its dignity and integrity. But they also allow and demand human beings to enhance life and improve conditions of human living. Scientific research, technological innovation, economic growth, political structures and cultural development are instruments which can and shall be used for these objectives – to the Glory of God. This leads from an Abrahamic perspective to ten ethical criteria for the development and use of biotechnologies. They are positive, if they contribute to these goals:

1. *Contributing to meet basic human needs:* Reduction of hunger and poverty is a priority. Basic human needs include material, social, participatory and religious needs. Human beings have material and non material needs. Technologies should contribute to have “enough for everybody’s need, but not for everybody’s greed” (Mahatma Gandhi).
2. *Respecting and enabling a life in dignity:* Meeting needs is not a goal in itself. Material and non material goods and services are instruments for a meaningful life in dignity of human and non-human beings. Biotechnology must be life-centered, human-centered.
3. *Promoting equity in access and distribution of natural resources, goods and services:* technologies should support fairness and equity in access and distribution to goods and services in the whole value chain from raw material to production, trade and consumption up to recycling. Just wages and prices are central part of it. Equity/justice includes many aspects such as research justice, climate justice, income justice, tax justice, gender justice and procedural justice.

4. *Promoting sustainability*: a sustainable technology and economy balances short term needs of present and long term needs of future generations, with incentives for long term decisions and charges for short term speculation. In environmental terms, it strives for a sustainable ecological footprint which means that individuals and society live within the long term resources and means available and not beyond as it is the case today.
5. *Promoting human and animal health*: biotechnologies often promise to contribute to health of human and non human beings. Many people expect positive impacts on medical treatment but fear negative impacts on health especially from genetically modified food. The criterium of contributing to health has to be linked to the other criteria such as equity and dignity.
6. *Promoting security and social peace*: biotechnologies can contribute to security and social peace if they are accompanied by careful social processes and by regulations against criminal or military abuse. Otherwise they can endanger security and peace.
7. *Promoting participation in decision-making*: Dignity is violated if people become purely objects of the decisions of others. Technologies should support people to take their life in their hands, to participate in decisions and to contribute (e.g. to economic production) and not only to receive (e.g. as beggars of food aid).
8. *Increasing efficiency in use of resources and funds*: Natural, financial, human and time resources are limited. A responsible management of resources includes a careful, efficient use and reuse of resources. Technologies are positive, if they contribute to it. In other cases, more efficient than technological solutions are administrative and organizational solutions (e.g. fighting corruption).
9. *Preserving biological and cultural diversity*: Biodiversity as well as the diversity of languages, and cultures are an expression of God's wonderful creation. Respect and preserve diversity is careful response to God.
10. *Enabling balanced development*: The technological and related economic innovation is so fast that educational, ethical, political and legal adaptation is often far behind. This leads to dangerous social tensions and affects against technologies and modernization. Technological innovation is only sustainable and peaceful if it is accompanied by strong efforts on ethical, social, educational and legal aspects of its implementation.

6.2 The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights

Some of the ten ethical criteria are also visible and reflected in the "UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005) with its 15 Principles (Art. 3-17). It shows that ethical criteria based on Christian, Islamic or Jews principles are to a great extent compatible non-religious and non-Abrahamic justifications of ethical values.

UNESCO Article	Ethical Values
1. Human Dignity and human rights (Art. 3)	Dignity, freedom
2. Benefit and harm (Art. 4)	Equity, Dignity
3. Autonomy and individual responsibility (Art. 5)	Respect, Responsibility
4. Consent (Art. 6)	Participation, freedom
5. Persons without the capacity to consent (Art. 7)	Participation, freedom
6. Respect for human vulnerability and personal integrity (Art. 8)	Dignity, Integrity, Protection
7. Privacy and confidentiality (Art. 9)	Respect, Trust,
8. Equality, justice and equity (Art. 10)	Equality

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 9. Non-discrimination and non-stigmatization (Art. 11) | Equity, Dignity |
| 10. Respect for cultural diversity and pluralism (Art. 12) | Freedom, Community, |
| 11. Solidarity and cooperation (Art. 13) | Solidarity |
| 12. Social responsibility and health (Art. 14) | Protection of life, social peace |
| 13. Sharing of benefits (Art. 15) | Equity/Justice, peace |
| 14. Protecting future generations (Art. 16) | Intergenerational justice |
| 15. Protection of the environment, the biosphere and biodiversity (Art. 17) | Sustainability |

7. Global and Contextual Bioethics

In a globalized, interdependent world, the relation between a global perspective, global ethics, and contextual responses and implementation is crucial. Six different models can be observed:

Model	Description	Examples
Domination	„We have the truth“. One model is valid for all	Some religious ethics
Confrontation	„You or me“ Clash of Civilizations	Fundamentalisms
Syncretization (syncretism)	„All are the same“ Forget the differences	Mystic ethics, new age
Contextualisation	„Global values adapted to my context“	e.g. Christian bioethics in the context of Switzerland or Iran
Regionalization	„We have the same values in our region“	„Arabic values“, „Asian Values“
Glocalisation	„Think global, act local“	Human dignity for all means in my local hospital...

Domination behavior violates the dignity of the other, confrontation threatens peace and syncretism does not take seriously the other in his or her otherness. But contextualization, regionalization and globalization are efforts to combine global and contextual perspectives.

8. Conclusion: Interreligious Common Research: Globethics.net services

Bioethics as an ethical orientation for the research and use or refuse of biotechnologies needs international and global efforts and cooperation in today's interdependent world. Mobility allows medical treatment wherever in the world one can afford it. Research results can be known worldwide. But in order to participate in an informed consent, information, documentation and dialogue is needed. Globethics.net, the Geneva based global network on ethics with 16'000 registered participants from over 200 countries, (including 750 from Iran) offers a platform for this scientific exchange. With its leading Global Digital Library on Ethics it offers, for free, access to full text books and articles (40'000 documents with the keyword bioethics). It offers specialized collections such as on health ethics, online research groups, daily news on ethics and international conferences. Registration and access is free under www.Globethics.net.