

Ecumenical Strategies of Change

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I first congratulate the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance for its efforts and successes in its short time of existence. As one of its founders and as former moderator of its Strategy Group on Trade I still accompany with high interest the EAA developments in its strategy and content. I also see great potential to cooperating with Globethics.net (www.globethics.net), the global online network on ethics which has its offices only two floors above EAA in the Ecumenical Center in Geneva and of which I am the founding president and now Director. The Ecumenical Advocacy Assembly that we now opened is an important further milestone in the development of EAA.

In times of fast changing environment with the financial crises and all societal implications that it will provoke, and the climate challenges which will profoundly change all aspects of life and sectors of society, the question for us becomes even more urgent: *What are the ecumenical strategies of change and transformation?* In the short time given let me select five aspects as food for thought for the discussion and deliberations.

1. Network: Engaging in innovative, surprising cooperation

Challenge: The cooperation crunch. In today's interconnected, globalised world, half of the success for an issue is networking and partnering. Tell me what are your partners and I tell you how successful you will be. EAA (as well as many of the represented organizations) is a success story in networking. But the cooperation crunch continues: I very much like to meet you here, to meet friends. But too often we meet in ecumenical meetings the same people under a different organizational label. If I know more than 50 percent of people in a meeting I become suspicious. Did we do our "missionary" job to enlarge the circle? The relationship especially to the private sector must become more dynamic. We need an ecumenical "double strategy" which allows clear critique of companies e.g. in the pharmaceutical, food or oil industry. But we need at the same time increased cooperation with the private sector. My experience shows that this double strategy is possible and even needed for the credibility of our advocacy work! The big challenges of our time such as the climate challenge and HIV/Aids can be solved only by cooperation of the different sectors of society.

Examples: The Global Humanitarian Forum Geneva GHF with its president Kofi Annan held its high level meeting on "climate change with a human face" in Geneva last June. In the GHF Board, Oxfam and World Vision are represented, not the Churches. In the last minute, through Walter Fust, the Director General of the Forum and also the new president of Globethics.net, I could achieve that WCC could take part in the meeting with a number of representatives. Networking counts.

Three days ago I received from Ethos in Geneva the "Investor Statement on a Global Agreement on Climate Change". Three global networks of investors with 135 invest-

ment institutions with 6 trillion USD assets (!), signed last week this strong call for climate measures. I enjoyed counting 12 churches and church related investment institutions among the 135 institutions! The voice of churches becomes visible because of the surprising context: Churches and investor networks struggling together in innovative cooperation.

Also cooperation in advocacy with younger evangelicals in the US and Europe is possible, since they are more involved in developmental and environmental issues. The chance of expanding participation of catholic organizations within EAA seems to be quite obvious. Inter-religious advocacy is challenging, but very promising.

Theological-ethical input: Jesus' strategy of change (provoking "metanoia", change towards God) was often linked to surprising, unexpected meetings and coalitions, overcoming all kind of borders: eating with "sinners", struggling with foreigners like the Syro-phenician woman, cooperating with "bankers" and "exploiters" like Zacchaeus etc. Ethical: The goal does not justify every means and any cooperation. But good intention is neither enough. Responsible action to being heard and to reaching goals needs clear strategies of networking and symbolic, surprising coalitions. The kind of partners we choose is an expression of how inclusive or exclusive we act. This approach is "pragmatic", but at the same time "prophetic" and "practical": overcoming frontiers is prophetic, reaching envisaged goals is practical (see Jenny Borden: *Prophetic, Pragmatic and Practical*, Geneva 2007). If EAA publishes a statement against speculation with food crops together with Christian Investor Groups and with Islamic Banking partners or with Warren Buffet, it may get more attention than if it is a statement of agencies alone.

Strategic goal: *Ecumenical strategies of change and transformation need innovative networking including not expected partners. Cooperation with such partners is possible as long as agreement can be reached on a specific topic even if in many other fields there are disagreements and different institutional "cultures". The double strategy of critique and cooperation leads to credible advocacy.*

2. Marketing: Strengthening new electronic forms of campaigning

Challenge: *The technological crunch.* In churches and agencies, we are very strong in content, *what* we have to say, but less strong in *how* we say and market it in an innovative way. The ecumenical movement is strong in grassroots campaigning, especially with its very large, global basis in the local parishes. Compared to that, the ecumenical movement is relatively weak in using electronic networking and campaigning. But information flows in the modern information society are fast.

Examples: Mobile phones, internet, decentralized community radios, internet based social networks etc. offer many opportunities and tools for advocacy work. Some tools are used by churches, others not enough. Globethics.net as an electronic network offers access to information and documentation and electronic workgroups and research teams. The global digital library on ethics that we launched in October give access for free to large amount of content otherwise not accessible or only for much money.

Theological-ethical input: God gives believers manifold instruments and technologies to raise their voice: with singing and trumpets, with mourning and scripture, with books and radio, with sms and e-voting. Evangelicals use modern information and communication technologies often in a more professional and innovative way than we do.

Strategic goal: Ecumenical strategies of change and transformation need more energy and resources in the “how” (marketing with electronic means) compared to the “what” (content of the message).

3. Flexibility: Accelerating decision making

Challenge: The institutional crunch. Especially electronic networking is linked to relatively flat hierarchies and with fast decision making procedures. Everybody can look for friends and coalitions in social networking platforms. On the other hand, the decision making procedures in most of the church related institutions are still slow and complicated - as if nobody has trust in God and in his spirit: Everybody wants to control everybody. If somebody catches the “kairos” (the right moment) for a courageous statement, the first remark of the superiors is often not “Congratulation for your message” but “Are you entitled to speak on behalf of...?” And too many resources are bound in restructuring church institutions and specialized ministries over years and years - whereas lean organizations dominate and influence the “market” and public opinion. The financial and economic crisis and breakdown shows that “just in time” and coordinated decisions to reduce the crisis are needed. The G-20 over last weekend shows the willingness of key powers to cooperate. Churches do not seem to be in a crisis. The pressure to act and closer cooperate seems not be high enough.

Positive example: The restructuring and closer cooperation of ACT International, ACT development, EAA and WCC is an encouraging step in the right direction. But more steps will be needed and decision making processes must become faster.

Theological-ethical input: Participation in decision making is a high ethical value because participation is an expression of respecting human dignity and God who calls us his co-workers. But participation has to be linked to the ethical principle of subsidiarity (the appropriate level of decision making). To delegate the competence to the appropriate level up or down is an expression of responsible leadership and good stewardship in the management of limited resources.

Strategic goal: Ecumenical strategies of change and transformation need faster and easier decision making process by delegation of competences within the respective organizations. The human, financial and time resources for such decisions have to be reduced.

4. Power: Lobbying on top level with top-down approach

Challenge: The ideological crunch. Development agencies and – especially protestant – churches defend and practice with success the bottom-up approach e.g. with campaigning and grassroots projects. Behind this fact I often observe an unexpressed ideological premise that the top-down approach is unethical and therefore to be avoided. To lobby or even to cooperate with those in power is likely interpreted as collusion. There is suspicion that (all) power is evil.

Examples: EAA is a good example that we are strong in advocacy by campaigning bottom-up, but EAA is less strong in advocacy by lobbying top-down. The fact that WCC does not strengthen the UN lobby working in New York and Geneva is not only a result of lack of resources, but of lack of unity in recognizing the importance of the top-down approach. Other example: I just came back from China. The Catholic Church in China is five times smaller than the Protestant but has at least five times more theological doctoral students in Europe and USA and has more excellent catholic teachers in state Universities than the Protestants.

Theological-ethical input: The option for the poor and caring for the weakest is a clear mandate of the Gospel. But it is also a clear mandate to reach those in power. The prophets converted not only the people, but (often first) the kings. Power on all levels is neither good nor evil per se, but has to be used in favor of justice and the weaker.

Strategic goal: Ecumenical strategies of change and transformation need a clear “yes” to the top-down approach, complementary to the important bottom-up approach. To try to addressing the top level of decision makers is not only a noble option, but an obligation if we want real change.

5. Time: Encouraging long term strategies

Challenge: The sustainability crunch. In the advocacy work as in all work, time is a crucial factor. Should we opt for short term successes or long term impact? Of course both, but it is often not easy to reconcile them.

Examples: The ecumenical movement often was in front of developments, was attacked because it was ahead of time: the anti-apartheid movement, the program against racism and many development programs. Rajendra Pachauri, Nobel Price winner and president of the IPCC panel, attested in his video for the WCC Round Table last May in Geneva, that he was much influenced and supported in climate change issues by the WCC, since twenty years. The long term efforts bear their fruits today even if many do not know that WCC was active in this topic for such a long time. Other example: I’m convinced that the Africa development strategy needs, in many respects, to start in China. Advocacy work to supporting the poor in Africa had to start in the 1990ies with lobbying and campaigning at the IMF in Washington and the national governments in the North. Today, this advocacy has to include China/Beijing in first priority. China has a greater influence than IMF and World Bank in Africa today. China started it forty years ago, not yesterday.

Theological-ethical input: Long term advocacy needs a long term analysis and vision. Sustainable strategies need the courage to reach the goal not on a straight road but often through indirect approaches and routes. God’s chosen people reached the promised land only after forty years of detours in the desert and the liberation and new beginning started in the long and painful detour of the Babylonian exile.

Strategic goal: Ecumenical strategies of change and transformation need plans not only in four years election periods like politics, but need in addition twenty or forty years perspectives. Long term thematic work is sustainable, even if it may be less visible and therefore stays in tension to the marketing and flexibility criteria.

If we in EAA and the ecumenical movement as a whole are

- more innovative in our cooperation and partnerships
- more sensitive to new electronic marketing mechanisms
- more flexible and faster in decision making processes
- more ambitious to reach the top decisions makers
- more sustainable through long term planning,

then, I’m sure, that this assembly will take good, courageous decisions and can make a difference and support change. I wish you God’s Spirit in your deliberations.