

God's Strategy for Life

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In 2000, the UN declared eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to guarantee basic needs for everybody. These are based on biblical goals. But God's basic needs strategy is more radical. His "last judgement" gives orientation and clear perspectives for the ethics and diaconal work of the church.

The story of the last judgment is tough: it is an eschatological vision of the last days of time where the good and evil will be separated, the white sheeps on the right, the good side, from the black goats on the left and evil side. But this story is not primarily on separation but on ethical behaviour and doing the good. It's not about the afterlife but about the here and now. The goal is God's vision of his kingdom of justice, human dignity for all and a peaceful and harmonious society. Let's analyze the list of ethical virtues listed in the text:

"³⁴Then the King will say to the people on his right: You who are blessed by my Father: come! Come and receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. ³⁵I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, ³⁶ naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me." (Matthew 25: 34-36).

Six actions of love

God's basic needs strategy includes six concrete actions of love (they are also called merits (?) of mercy, merits of diaconia):

1. Hunger → food
2. Thirst - → water
3. Stranger (exclusion)→ community (inclusion)
4. Nakedness → clothes (protection, dignity)
5. Sickness → health, care
6. Prison → visit the prisoner (inclusion in community)

This simple but profound list of basic human needs shows what we need for life in dignity. Not luxury, not sophisticated life styles but first of all to cover the basic needs such as food, clothes, housing, protection, security and community. God wants that we care first of all for the basics! The evangelist Matthew is very clear reporting Jesus' vision. But he is at the same time modest in report. The evangelist Luke is more radical when he quotes Jesus that he came "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and to release the oppressed" (Luke 4: 18) and not just to visit the prisoners as Matthew says. And also the prophet Isajah was more radical when he said that the true fasting is to "loose the chains of injustice and set the oppressed free" (Isajah 58: 6-8). But Matthew as Luke and Marc is clearly centered on basic needs.

The UN-basic needs strategy

We now compare God's basic needs strategy with an UN-basic needs strategy decided in 2000 under the title of the UN-Millennium Development Goals. They will be monitored in September 2005 (MDG+5) by the UN General Assembly. They include eight goals:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development .

Four of the six biblical goals appear in the UN-strategy: food, water, clothes (housing, protection), health. Two important goals do not appear: to include the stranger in the community in order to become an inclusive worldwide community and to care for the prisoners or to liberate them. UN avoids to mention the hot issues such as migration, strangers, and the political prisoners or violation of human rights. The basic needs according to God include material goods, but also community, liberation and spiritual goods. The UN exclude the hot and politically controversial issues in order to unite humanity behind the eight other goals which is understandable. But God in Jesus openly calls for liberation and inclusion of all human (and even nonhuman) beings in his community.. But the UN goals challenge also biblical interpretation: to promote gender equality is a third goal which is not explicitly mentioned in Jesus' strategy. Implicitly it's there and must be made explicit today: God's call for love for all human beings as well as the call for justice includes gender justice and gender equality.

God's offer

A goal of the last judgment is not to be a threat or a heavy burden but it's the great offer of God: those who worry for God's basic need strategy will be blessed by God and will see his Kingdom! God's basic needs strategy should be the foundation and point of reference and orientation also for ECLOF's vision and strategy. And God promises not only that you see his Kingdom but that he accompanies us on this way with his spirit. A great promise and encouragement!