

The Second Stellenbosch Consensus. 20 theses on Sustainable Growth, 7 February 2013

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The following theses were the outcome of a consultation by representatives of German and South African churches between 5-7 February 2013 in Stellenbosch, South Africa trying to reach a consensus between North and South on the implications of sustainable growth. The meeting included church leaders, theologians, economists and people of other professions from both countries. It was the follow up to a consultation in 2010 on globalization, which produced 20 theses known since then as the “Stellenbosch Consensus”. In calling the following 20 theses “The Second Stellenbosch Consensus” the intention is to deliberately express continuity with the 2010 consultation. The relationship between ecological questions and questions of justice is the subject of fiery debate between wealthy countries and countries struggling to overcome poverty. This controversy was also evident in the debates during this consultation. It is therefore all the more significant that our common ground as churches has nevertheless led us to the following consensus.

Preamble

The following theses are an expression of concern and of hope. We are concerned about the direction that the journey of humankind on this planet entrusted to us by God has taken. Excessive use of natural resources by human beings and an ever-increasing amount of CO₂ emissions has led to a continuous destruction of the earth. While many people still live in poverty, others live in affluence, and economic and social inequality are increasing. The ongoing increase of the world population and the urgent effort to make a life of dignity possible for every human person have raised the fundamental question of how life on earth for everybody can be shaped in a way reconcilable with the dignity of non-human nature and the life possibilities of future generations. Simply continuing current global economic activities will lead to a dead end. We have to turn the process around. A transformation towards an ecologically and sustainable economy is necessary.

As churches we confess that we have not fulfilled our responsibility to care for God’s creation in the way we are called to do. We see the need for developing perspectives for the expression of such respect in a highly complex global economy and society. We speak as people of faith who come from Christian spiritual traditions, but who are in need and open to learn from other cultures – including indigenous cultures – in order to find the inspiration for creating a relationship between human beings and non-human nature which is characterised by respect. At the same time we hope that our conclusions are relevant for the publics of modern pluralistic societies in search of orientation. We understand such “public theology” as a service to the world which we are called to render as Christians.

We therefore offer the following consensus to our churches, to all people of good will, to global civil society and to governments that are looking for moral guidance in their daily decisions and for their long-term policies. This consensus is a sign of hope for us. We see it as an encouraging example that we can find a common direction for the future journey of humankind beyond differences of context and of culture. We commend it to the churches and to global civil society for review and further discussion.

1. We can influence the course of our future – we are responsible for our actions.
2. Human beings and nature are equally created by God. Therefore our relationship to nature should not be characterised by domination but by respect and good will.
3. Respect for nature and responsibility for future generations require a fundamental transformation of our global economy toward low carbon development and a new, low-resource model of prosperity.

4. We need to take into account the increasing scientific consensus on the damage of climate change and on the limitation of natural resources and the capacity to absorb waste, pollution, CO₂ emissions etc., which point towards the impossibility of globalising unsustainable models of material wealth.
5. Each human being on this earth has the same right to participate equally in the global wealth of natural resources. Present levels of inequality and injustice are irreconcilable with this right. This right places limits on private ownership of, and trade in, natural resources.
6. The question of ecological reorientation must be inseparably linked with concerns for justice and human rights.
7. We do not believe in shifting the cost of our present lifestyle to people in poorer countries and future generations. We consider it to be the responsibility of the rich to support the poor everywhere in the process of transformation. We consider it to be the responsibility of those who cause damage to the environment or to other people to bear the costs. Because of the different levels of contribution to environmental and social problems in the past, and also because the difference in the needs and in the technological and financial means and economic strength of different nations, we affirm that all nations have a common but at the same time different responsibility for sustainable development.
8. Taking justice and human rights seriously implies acknowledging the necessity of growth to achieve human development to a minimum standard of living in dignity for each human being. Yet moving out of poverty requires different kinds of growth and transformation.
9. Growth must be a qualitative growth, which means that it is promoted only where it is reconcilable with both improving the situation of the poor and limiting harm against non-human nature to a sustainable level. This requires an economy that lives up to the goal of sustainability in all its dimensions. The market economy needs to be reformed accordingly to embrace the values of a socio-ecological market.
10. We need technological progress to enable energy and resource efficiency and consistency. Possible “rebound effects” on increased consumption levels need to be taken seriously and addressed appropriately. At the same time we need to strongly reduce the intensity of natural resource utilisation of our economies in general.
11. Markets are blind to ecology and justice; it is not their duty to protect the environment or care about fair distribution. But they can play a role in allocating scarce natural resources. Prices which reflect the ecological cost reveal the preciousness of such resources and thus help the economy to use and allocate them with greater care.
12. Individual states and intergovernmental organisations in particular must play a decisive role in allocating scarce natural resources by encouraging, guiding and monitoring a responsible use of common goods such as water and air, and by making sure that all citizens, also the less advantaged ones, benefit from them.
13. State regulation should prevent economic actors from over-exploiting the natural and social commons for private advantage. Political strategies are required for legally framing economic activities in a way that gives incentives for saving natural resources.
14. Governments and corporations should review and make transparent the impact of all their national and cross-border operations, processes and structures on the economic, social and cultural rights and on the environment in order to minimise harm.
15. Transformation can be effected by substantially moving towards sustainable production and consumption patterns and by embracing a holistic vision of the good life. Religions and caring people can contribute to such a vision, which embraces the value of sufficiency.
16. Companies and organisations need to continue to embrace guiding values and institutional designs in their policies and governance that enable transformation. This might also contribute to self-benefit.
17. Transformation includes a change of social norms and values for the common good of humankind and creation.

18. The transformation we call for is global in nature. We need new forms of multilateral cooperation and democratic global institutions, structures and binding global conventions to enhance and drive transformative and just processes towards sustainability, nurturance of creation and human development.
19. Transformation also requires global financial and trading institutions to seriously reconsider their policies and systems of operations in the light of building a more just and equal world.
20. As churches we commit ourselves to contribute to the necessary change by concrete action such as consciously reorienting our consumption patterns, our use of mobility or the energy use in our buildings. Through word and deed we recommit ourselves to a vision of fulfilled life which includes a life of dignity for every human person and a relationship to nature mirroring its character as God's creation.

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