



Christ in the City

Addis Abeba Partner Churches Consultation

22. February 2015, 11.00h

**"Now get up and go into the city,
and you will be told what you are to do." Acts 9, 6**

**"...but stay in the city until you have been clothed with the power from
on high." Lk 24,49**

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

Mega-cities and shrinking cities, high-speed urbanization and slow city growth - the world's cities are changing. The differences between city and rural areas are diminishing worldwide, everything is becoming 'city' in a variety of physical and structural forms. New shapes for cities, new urban landscapes, new global and local spatial networks are emerging. Within these dynamics we speak about the church in the city. We are talking about "Christ in the City". One of the most significant moves in these decades is the transformation of the city.

In 2011 in a bestseller the author Doug Sanders describes urbanization as the most challenging transformation in the twenty-first century. In his brilliant and disturbing essay he shows the risks for our future. He starts his book about urbanization with the words: "What will be remembered about the twenty-first century, more than anything else except perhaps the effects of a changing climate, is the great and final shift of populations out of rural, agricultural life and into cities. We will end this century as a wholly urban species ... It will be the last movement of this size and scope." And the dangerous situation of this move he describes with the following words: "These 'arrival cities' are the places where the next great economic and cultural boom will be born, or where the next great explosion of violence will occur. The difference depends on our ability to notice, and our willingness to engage."¹

¹ Doug Saunders, Arrival City, London 2011



I shall proceed in six steps in my address. Beginning with the question, why must the Church talk about the city? Then follows a sociological view of the new urbanization. Then I shall make a few comments from a European theological perspective, looking at a debate on God in the City that took place 30 to 40 years ago. This is followed by Biblical images and a few concrete steps for church action. And finally I shall look at a specific bible story and consider what hope it can give us for the future of the cities. The commission named by Luke applies to us:

“...but stay in the city until you have been clothed with the power from on high.” Lk 24,49

Now it's up to me, as a German partner in this consultation, to open the debate with my address. This is an anachronism, because the time of the cities in Western European countries is over. The decisive pressure of urbanization is not to be found in Germany or France or Italy nowadays. More than 90 percent of the inhabitants in Germany are already living in cities. The explosion of cities and the new urbanization is a phenomenon on other continents, not in Europe. In Germany we are talking about shrinking cities as a result of the actual demographic situation and developments. Some statistics state that the German population will shrink by more than 20 Million inhabitants in the upcoming generations in the period of the next 40 years.

In recent years I was responsible in the EKD in monitoring research about urbanization. I published a paper with the headline: God in the City. But this paper was focusing only on the European situation. So I'll try my best to widen my horizon when I am now talking about our joint challenges.

I. Why do we talk about cities in the church?

Why do we have to talk about urbanization in the church? There are different reasons for that.

A. The first reason is simple: We, as pastors and bishops, have to share the experiences of the people who are following Jesus. And the majority of Christians are living in cities. As pastors we are part of the discipleship of our congregations. Cities do not emerge of their own accord, they are made by people. And we are at their side.

B. Secondly: One of the results of the new urbanization is an enormous split in our





societies. We have a critical and alarming dimension of injustice and a new apartheid. First: Inside the cities. Second: Outside. We are well aware of the apartheid in the city. On one side the ghettoization, segregation into favelas and townships, and secured areas and gated communities and neighborhoods on the other side. But the second form of segregation and injustice we see between the people, who are living in the cities and the ones living in rural areas and in wasted and deserted landscapes below poverty level.

C. The third reason, why we have to deal with this subject is in the number of refugees and migration worldwide. The UN refugee agency reported last year that the number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people worldwide has, for the first time in the post-World War II era, exceeded 50 million people. Although this massive increase was driven mainly by the war in Syria, which at the end of last year had forced 2.5 million people into becoming refugees and made 6.5 million internally displaced, still the biggest numbers of refugees were found in Africa - notably in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. The flight into the cities is one of the main reasons for migration beside terror and war.

Doug Sanders writes: "The largest migration in human history is about to send more than two billion people - a third of humanity - from rural to urban areas. The stage on which this epic migration is taking place is the Arrival City, a new urban space which will radically alter our future." In Europe we don't know these arrival cities in the twentieth and twenty-first century. We have had Arrival Cities in the second half of the nineteenth century during the period of industrialization with Paris, London, Manchester and Berlin. But we can't compare these decades in Europe with the inflation of new mega-cities world-wide today. According to the original definition of the UN, a mega-city is a city with more than 10 Million inhabitants. However the status of a mega-city no longer only depends on just the number of inhabitants. Its territorial importance, its political influence and also its economic power also count. For this reason metropolitan areas are also considered as mega-cities. Today there are 22 mega-cities in the world, of these 15 just in Asia and South America. Counted all together, around 300 million people live in them.

D. And the fourth reason to deal with this subject of urbanization lies in the Bible itself. The City has always contained within itself a double secret of good and evil, of holiness and sin. We only

need to think of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Babel and the curses that we read of in Revelation. At the same time the City is one of the most important places for the encounter between God and man: God dwells in her, sanctifies and comforts her, gives her true joy, she is the faithful City that will be re-populated through God's grace. In the City the Son will be received, the Eucharist will be instituted, Jesus' resurrection takes place there and God sends His Spirit out into the City. And one day Emanuel will return in glory to the City, to dwell there forever among the people and to share there the joy of never-ending love.

E. And at last, there is an important remembrance. In the autumn of 1985, thirty years ago, the Anglican Church gave a report to the public: Faith in the City. It was a call to Action by Church and Nation, and was published by the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas. The report came in the wake of much concern about what was happening in British inner city and outer council housing estate communities. Faith in the City was crucial in sparking new awareness of the emerging gaps in society. It seems to me, we are right in a similar urge necessity in our churches to invent such a Call for our Nations and in our churches to face the challenges, which are given to us in the cities of these days.

II. The City, the future for (almost) everyone?

"A city, it is said, is a collection of people who came together, because they hoped to be able to live better and more happily in this way." This was how Giovanni Botero, an Italian philosopher in the 16th Century characterized the city.

The city, chided as a den of iniquity and celebrated as a place of freedom has, since its invention over almost 10,000 years ago, been a continually growing form of settlement. And every city – whether Mumbai, Cape Town, Berlin or Rio de Janeiro – remains a great and often unfulfilled promise of a good life. And this promise means that the cities in almost all parts of the world are growing at amazing speed. However, while in Lagos, Jakarta, Seoul, Tokyo, Mexico City and Karachi have already become mega-cities, in Europe many cities are shrinking. But even in Europe urbanization is continuing. The largest German city, Berlin is somewhere between 80th and 100th on the list of the largest cities of the world. Internationally therefore Germany only has small cities.



In 2008 for the first time, more than half of the world's population lived in cities.

This ancient, and at the same time highly modern form of settlement, brings with it the promise of freedom and happiness, and draws millions of people under its spell every year throughout the world. They leave the rural areas in order to find in the cities not only a job, but also a new home. They flee from drought or the destruction of their countryside, they seek protection from persecution or places where they can survive, and they travel thousands of kilometers hoping for a better life. Every day more than 150,000 people move into the cities of this world. Every four days a new city the size of Hanover is created, every three months a new city the size of New York.

In view of the growth of the world population there is no sensible alternative to living in a city for the majority of people. The city is the only form of living together that offers us a chance to responsibly use the limited areas of the world suitable for people to live in. The whole population of the Netherlands lives in one large city as far as population density is concerned. In the metropolitan area of Tokyo, the world's largest mega-city at present, more than 35 million people live within the 50 kilometres surrounding the Emperor's Palace of the Japanese capital.

In the regions where the mega-cities are growing a housing sprawl is unthinkable on account of the inhospitability of the landscape. There is no alternative to dense population of the people in the cities. Anything else would mean a dangerous housing sprawl with enormous destruction of nature and disastrous ecological consequences. If by the year 2030, of the then eight billion people in the world at least five billion live in cities, some of these cities will have to grow gigantically and become extremely compacted in order to be able to make accommodation available to all the population. That shows drastically how the promises of city life will in future also include massive impositions: confined social environments, encounters with what was previously unknown, isolated existences, social schisms, public conflicts, incredible poverty and social impoverishment to a hardly conceivable extent.

The city lives from a togetherness of different people and strangers. The difference between the private sphere and the public sphere is part of the urban way of life. Public



life is the place for a stylized presentation of self and no one ever shows more than a small part of their personality. In the city in public places everyone meets others as strangers. And the fascinating game of public self-presentation can be studied in every open space. In the village there are no strangers.

These perceptions of the city have presumably changed the way we live together and how we see ourselves in a much deeper way than we perhaps like to admit. I do not know of any international comparisons about how the city is perceived internally. But what role do foreigners, different tribes, different casts (India) play in the city? How do such differing cultures meet each other?

Cities are large schools that teach us respect and tolerance. Cities are places of contrasts. The city creates environments that are attractive but at the same time endangered by their heterogeneity. However the answer to that is not indifference; then the city would be no more than a random co-existence of many people. The answer for us is Christian service to **all** residents of the city, a visible witness of our faith and tolerance in the midst of a plurality of beliefs, values and attitudes.

It is just this accelerated growth of the cities in our world that has led to a new awareness of urban built-up areas. What challenges will face these cities in future deserves wide attention. I am sure that the most important questions for the future of our planet are being raised in the cities.

In many cities the Christian churches are being challenged to work with others to actively shape the future of the cities. We can bear witness for a peaceful and just way of treating people within the cities. "In order to be a witness, go into the city: it is called the faithful city." This text is to be found at the beginning of the Book of Isaiah. (Isaiah 1, 26). And in the Psalms we are told: "Jerusalem is built as a city in which the people shall come together, where the tribes shall go to ...to praise the Name of the Lord." (Psalm 122, 3)



Throughout two centuries Christianity has been closely linked to the development of cities. The propagation of the Gospel has been promoted since the founding of the first Christian congregations in the cities. In Asia Minor and the Middle East the apostles and the early missionaries made use of the situation in the cities in order to proclaim their faith. Throughout many centuries, the pluralism of ways of life and values in a close area in connection with a large amount of individual freedom offered the best conditions for promoting each person's individual convictions. In this way since their invention, cities have always also been religiously productive places. In them founders of religions made their first disciples, ideologies and interpretive systems were multiplied and there niches existed in which even obscure claims to truth could find fertile ground. In cities there arose out of the mixture of different cultures, new convictions and old traditions the material for great interpretations of the world. In the market places, the old and new public places, the messages were then proclaimed.

III. The City in Western Theology in the Twentieth Century

In the second half of the twentieth century an intensive debate on the phenomenon of the 'City' started which can be divided into two phases. Both phases can be illustrated by studies of Harvey Cox. The first phase diagnosed the departure of traditional religion from the secularised City, the second proclaimed the return of religion into the secular City.²

In 1965 the book by Harvey Cox "The Secular City. Secularization and Urbanisation in Theological Perspective" was published. In the changes of the 1960s Cox brought together die issues of secularization and urbanisation. „Secularization“, the coming-of age of humans is, according to Cox „the legitimate consequence of the intrusion of biblical faith into history“. It takes place by a disenchantment of nature as a consequence of the creation belief, by a desacralisation of politics as a consequence of faith in the liberating God (exodus traditions) and by the profanation of values as a consequence of the Sinai covenant. From this stems, according to Cox, the necessity for church and theology to get involved with a secular world and to speak of God in a secular manner.

These developments take place primarily in a context that Cox calls “urbanisation”. He does not only mean this with regard to urbanisation, but two connected phenomena of citification: anonymity and mobility. Both are typical characteristics of the urban style that define the core of city-people. This leads on to a pragmatism that is primarily interested in functionality and a profanity that only cares for the secular. Church and theology are faced with a totally new situation: „The arrival of an urban civilisation and the collapse of traditional religion are the two decisive indicators of our time.“

Twenty years later Cox wrote the book „Religion in the Secular City“ (1983) where he stated the return of religion into the secular city in it. For Cox the arrival of the 1979 newly elected Pope John Paul II in Mexico-City was the symbol of this return. The leader of the biggest Christian church visits the biggest city which both in fact and by constitution is secularised. A new intrusion of religion in the city Cox sees on the American continent in two dramatic developments: in the intrusion of religious and political fundamentalism in North America supported by electronic media, and in the dominating power of Christian communities and the liberation theology in Central and South America.

IV. Biblical Images of the City

In the first book of the Bible the reality of cities is described in dramatic terms – and there is a struggle to interpret their contradictions. It is not only about Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities became the literary negative symbols of cities, but as part of them the „righteous“ played an important role as pillars of the city. At the same time Genesis deals with Cain, the symbolic father of all cities. Cain, the settler, who kills his brother Abel, the nomad, becomes a restless urban nomad driven by guilt and fear. Enoch, the name of the first biblical city that Cain founded (Gen 4, 17) is the name of his son. A clearer

Cf. Hans Werner Dannowski, „Suchet der Stadt Bestes“. Die gegenwärtigen Herausforderungen der Stadt und der Auftrag der Kirche, in: Kirchenamt der EKD (Hg), Internationale Citykirchenkonferenz vom 8.-10. Mai 2005 in Berlin. Bericht und Dokumentation, Hannover 2006



symbolism cannot be expressed, that city becomes „my father’s city“. Enoch – like all cities since then – is marked by the shadow of possible violence, but also by harp and flute players (Gen 4, 21–22). What does that mean for the image of our cities, what do they bear witness to? Culture and violence have remained as the basic tensions of all cities up until today. Cain as a person, but also Enoch and all the other cities nevertheless bear the mark of Cain on their forehead, which God gave as a protective sign to individual humans and to their cities, reminding them of their inalienable dignity and their being created in the image of God. Does that only apply to individuals or in a derived form also to the community of a city?

The last book of the Bible, the Revelation of John, speaks in strong terms about the vision of a new beginning, a new earth and new heaven, symbolised in the image of a new city (Revelation chapter 21 and 22). Not only humans, but also nature, culture and religion will be transformed. The beginning of the Bible is present at its end: Paradise. But it is not just a repetition. The utopia of the Paradise garden is quoted, but the garden has moved into the city. The rivers of Paradise flow through the city. The city is a work of art. A square of huge dimensions, adorned with absolute beauty, with twelve open gates which are adorned with twelve different valuable gemstones. In this way they show the collaboration of nature and art, of individuality and sociality. For each gate is constructed differently, but each is related to the others. The gates point to all points of the compass. They are never closed, not even at night. Everyone can come and go. The difference between stranger and resident is cancelled. Finally even night – the sphere of dark powers – is turned into light. Maybe the most surprising in this vision: there is no temple any more. God lives with and in the people. They are the living dwellings of God. City hall, schools, court houses are not required anymore. God’s spirit has taken residence in the hearts of the people.

The New City bears an ancient name: Jerusalem; this city fought over for thousands of years, often destroyed, rebuilt and divided. But Jerusalem on earth and the celestial city remain connected for the sake of their name. That means reflecting Biblical tradition: Cities are not just objectifications of humankind reflecting their light and shadow reality. Cities are also home to God’s spirit, they are tracks to the new, to the future. The utopia



of the pending, but approaching celestial Jerusalem interprets cities as experimental platforms of change and transformation. Cities are not just places of destruction and violence, they are also building sites for the future.

The meaning of the vision of the New City on the last pages of the Bible is unambiguous. The celestial Jerusalem is the critical benchmark for the humanity of the cities on earth. Their capital at the time and symbol of global rule was Rome. Every provincial metropolis had to take its bearings from the image of Rome. This earthly Rome that understands itself as a benchmark of its global empire is deposed in this vision, denounced as Babylon and thus its later destruction implied. The concept of the City of God on the other hand is the transformation of their lethal contradictions into creative tension, and the erection of law and justice for all its residents. The concept of the City is life in fullness: The lame people dance, the blind see, the deaf hear. The rich share their wealth, and those in debt bondage come free.

For the churches in the city this can mean that on the one hand they are the mark of Cain with regard to arrogance and hubris, but on the other hand also carriers of hope, as they proclaim God`s compassion with his creatures.

Jerusalem – Athens – Rome: Their richness as (European) cities is made up only through their tension-based interaction. Their full potentials have not been realised so far. And to state it: Without a culture of remembering and critical perception no vision of the future can be achieved.

V. Specific challenges

The visible task of proclaiming the Gospel requires courage and innovation in the city. The Gospel belongs on the market place. But where are the market places in the city? And who is playing on them? Churches need the courage to make use of public places. This can be for a “Stations of the Cross“ procession on Good Friday through the centre of the city, with seven stations, where stories of the suffering of people who live in the city can be read or people can be reminded of victims of the past year. Services can be



held in public places that show clearly and symbolically that the whole city is being prayed for, and that God's presence is celebrated. Most certainly the modern city needs churches that do not hide away from the public, but rather are fully aware of their public responsibility as part of society in the city and as its counterpart.

Religious literacy and missionary educational work

There are several dangers for the Christian faith in the city. One is the breakdown of religious traditions in the families. Traditional family ties break more easily in the environment of the big city than in village structures. But also a re-orientation to other religions is more likely in the city than in the countryside. In addition there is the pull of different ideologies and distractions, such as the ideology of consumption.

Religious literacy wishes to communicate basic Christian knowledge and an experience of a religious life. Its intention is to promote the formation and development of a faith that helps the person concerned. It is necessary to further develop helpful forms of action and content for this. In the church congregations, the schools and the Sunday Schools.

To do this in the cities will increasingly mean to consider the question, how adults who have grown up with no relationship to a church and in some cases without any form of religious education, can be won over to the Christian faith.

The combination of religious speech with spiritual charisma in a church congregation, or the development of a low-threshold adult catechism course are just some examples.

Social work of the churches in the city

We read in the gospel of St. Luke: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Luke 4:16-20

We owe the people of the city our diaconal work. We owe them to show, that the

In their document Prophetic Diakonia: for healing the world, the Lutheran World Federation emphasised the importance of the Diakonia by stating:

“Diakonia is central to what it means to be the Church. As a core component of the gospel, Diakonia is not an option but an essential part of discipleship. Diakonia reaches out to all persons, who are created in God’s image. While Diakonia begins as unconditional service to the neighbor in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms and transforms.” (Prophetic Diakonia: for healing the world, Lutheran World federation 2002.)

Diakonia is more than the strong serving the weak, which can lead to paternalistic assumptions and practices, and imply that some churches are unable to engage in Diakonia because of their lack of resources or expertise. We challenge this assumption. Diakonia is part of the calling of all churches and all Christians in the world. And in the Arrival Cities we have been forced to strengthen our diaconal work. The diaconal work is part of the life of the church; the mission is to assist in bringing justice to this world, and be the call for help of those in need. The lesson that Jesus taught was denouncing justice and announcing the Kingdom of God. This is done not only by word but also by action, making changes in the lives of active messengers in the important mission.

The Lutheran Churches under the umbrella of the LWF have created different principles with a common understanding of Diaconia and its work. It includes the different social and political perspectives of the worldwide communion, values and ethics, faith and love. The members of the LWF share the same principles in their parishes around the world, but it is considered that there is a wide gap between cultures, countries, languages and people.

Personnel

A return of the Church in the city will only be possible if the Church is willing to critically discuss the requirements for its work in the city. This requires clarification of the theological and spiritual competence required. Are there criteria suitable to define special challenges in the city? How can the formative idea of a “priesthood of all believers“ be constructively implemented in personnel policy and structures? How can qualified voluntary personnel be won over to work in an inner-city church, and how can they then be sufficiently supported, given further training and appreciated? What grade of



continuous further training is absolutely necessary, so that all personnel are especially capable of meeting the challenges?

Without continuing further training for all church personnel working in the city, the Church will not be able to meet the challenges of the city. And one of the most important competencies for the future, besides theological and spiritual competence, is the ability to work in a team. The dialogue structure of city existence demands the sharpening of church concepts in a team, as well as the strengthening of a spiritual community that feels itself responsible for the life of the whole city. Here we must develop models that make it possible to gain convincing qualifications for the work in inner-city churches. And here especially we must develop the possibility of networking beyond the well-known borders of the city and the congregation.

Ecumenical and inter-religious Dialogue

An important question for the city is whether in future religion will be a force for peacemaking, or whether it will have the potential to increase social and cultural conflicts. For the sake of the social co-existence between people of different religions there is no alternative to a dialogue of the denominations and religions in the city. The Christian churches have a special responsibility for maintaining peace in the city and it is therefore up to them to organize the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

This begins with getting to know each other. Then it will become clear what divides us and what we have in common. The question of dialogue is always linked to the question of what is my own belief. In the encounter with people of a different religion one's own religion can be newly substantiated again and even rediscovered. The ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue and the cooperation of the various religions for the benefit of the city belong together. The fact of having different religious roots does not mean that you cannot together seek what is best for the city. Advocacy work is something that we must all do together. That we pray in different places does not mean that we cannot stand up together for peace and justice in the city. Dialogue is not easy and requires institutional forms, which however offer the warranty for continuous encounter especially in critical times. In every city one church should give special attention to this dialogue as a representative of the others. Pastoral qualifications are absolutely required for this task, in which a basic idea of the city should be enacted out in an exemplary way: the respect



for strangers. It is necessary to have a reliable encounter, where representatives of all important religious communities of a city meet regularly, and besides discussing theological questions take a stance, especially on the situation of the city and their joint responsibility for its common good. And this does not mean just a cooperation of the mainline churches.

VI. Perspective: God in the City

What will be the future of the city and what role will the church play in it? Nobody knows it. But the hope for a humane development of the city, linked with a lively and diaconal church has a biblical foundation. When people who are called by God stop to flee from God and when they seek the best of the city, surprising things can happen. This is told in the story of Jonah.

Jonah and the city of Nineveh are the heroes of the story. Jonah represents the religious powers and the servants of God of any kind. Nineveh stands for glory and misery of an enemy city. The book of Jonah deals with the different strategies of these „heroes“ and of God`s presence in the world.

Jonah shows three futile strategies to flee from God: Flight, dealing in sacrifices and promises and finally impersonal apathy. His mission is to confront the „big city of Nineveh“ – according to the story at least 120 000 people which makes it a real city even by today`s standards– and to show the link between evil doings, misery and downfall. In accordance with his personal cost-benefit calculation he shies away from this call by flight. He absconds and takes a passage by ship to Tarsis, out of reach from others. On the boat – in order to be unreachable for his own probing questions – he practises a sleep of willing forgetfulness.

When this strategy does not work with God or the crew of the boat, he styles himself as a victim: „Throw me into the sea, for it is for my sake the storm has come.“ Thrown overboard he again finds himself in the depths, the greatest possible distance from God,



in the belly of the huge fish. Lost and saved at the same time he realises the impossibility of fleeing from God and confesses his situation before God:

"I descended to the roots of the mountains.

The earth with its bars was around me forever,

But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God ..." (Jonah 2, 6-7)

Jonah who experienced God's compassion physically on his own body, now promises to fulfil God's mission and travel to the city. "Three days traveling it takes to cross her".

Jonah sees its beauty and its misery and preaches - in accordance with his call - its approaching doom.

But surprising things happen: The city turns around. Down from the political top, the king, to the whole population of the city right to the animals everybody wears sackcloth and ashes as a classical sign of mourning and willingness to repent. Right at the start the king takes off the purple cloak, signalling a waiver of his usual distance from the „subjects“ and stands in solidarity with them. Ash Wednesday for everyone – not just for a day. "Order of the king and his powerful: Neither you nor your animals, neither cattle nor sheep shall eat nor shall they go to grass or drink." The city turns grey in grey. The threatening doom is symbolically anticipated. In deep misery and self-humiliation the unity of the city, the interdependence of all becomes tangible. We are reminded of the scenes of bombed-out cities after the war. In the face of destruction and misery all become equal.

Only Jonah seeks another attitude for himself. Different from those in Nineveh who have not fled, he seeks a high balcony on a mountainside, shaded from the sun by a big bush, to watch the destruction of the wicked city as a just punishment. This shows the infatuation with an apocalyptic scenario, especially one targeted against others, allegedly bad, strangers, threatening minorities. Let „for heaven's sake“ those scapegoats who are the cause of catastrophes receive their just punishment.



But again God does not pay him back in his own coin. He turns a worm into a preacher for the stubborn Jonah. It eats the bush's roots so that it drops its leaves, and Jonah has to bear the strong sun and heat. One last time this hero blows his top: He is angry with God who does not adhere to the strategy of causality of deed and punishment that Jonah assumes. Incidentally this had saved Jonah's life before. God's answer is a question: „You are angry because of a bush ... which you had not made, which grew up in one night and died in one night. And I should not lament about Nineveh, such a big city in which more than one hundred and twenty thousand people live who do not know right from left, and so many animals as well?“ (Jonah 4, 9 -11)

A hope for the cities and their religious powers that only have regard for their own aims and their future within their own secure prognosis, is built on sand. It is not the prophets of doom who are called to predict the future. The last word does not belong to apocalyptic visionaries where the development of our cities is concerned. For this is the lesson from the story of Jonah. We can reckon with God's surprise. The great merciful gesture of God is God's answer to realities, be they ever so threatening, sinful or desperate. God's gesture and response is not destruction and annihilation. It stands for healing.

And from this gesture we can derive hope for the future of our cities.

"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do." Acts 9, 6

"...but stay in the city until you have been clothed with the power from on high." Lk 24,49