The Globalisation Project

Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche, Germany
Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa
“...break the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free”

— Isaiah 58.6
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Our hope is to build consensus on the basis of our shared faith.
When the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) took its famous decision on apartheid in 1982, it did more than put a new item on the agenda of the churches. That decision confronted us with the reality of racism, the churches’ complicity in its establishment, sustenance and justification and how churches and Christians benefited from it. The decision also confronted the churches with the fact that our conduct on this matter has brought pain and misery to the victims of racism, put unbearable strain on relationships of Christian communion, brought under suspicion the integrity of the Gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the witness of the church in the world. It raised the issues of justice, peace, reconciliation and human dignity as seldom before, and enforced upon us the need to consider the meaning of our common confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, and our understanding of our life together as Reformed churches in the world.

In 2004, the World Alliance’s decision on the Accra Confession applied the same critique to the context of global realities and global injustice. The churches have been complicit in the establishment of global injustice at least since 1492, sustaining it, and justifying it (still now) as well as benefiting from it. We use the term “Accra Confession” not in the sense of a confession adopted by individual churches in a formal process, but in the way it is presented to the churches of the Reformed family by the Accra General Council and is being used in the ecumenical dialogue. The Accra General Council, as did the Ottawa General Council twenty-two years earlier, “discerned the signs of the times” judged the situation and acted upon it. The integrity of the Gospel and of our faith was now challenged by the frightening realities of globalisation, the global economy and its consequences for economic, ecological, and gender justice especially in their impact on the most vulnerable persons and communities in the world where our churches live, work and testify to the love and compassionate justice of God in Jesus Christ.

As in 1982, the World Alliance once again requested its member churches to engage these matters seriously, reminded always of our love in Jesus Christ as our strongest common bond, our witness as Reformed Churches and our commitment to compassionate justice, unity, reconciliation and human dignity. Throughout the WARC family, the debates were tense, sometimes fierce, and sometimes almost divisive.

Two churches, the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, took the call for this engagement with the Accra Confession and its consequences for the churches as seriously as we thought it was meant. Within an existing agreement for cooperation and witness, the two churches, in working together, set up what has become known as the “Globalisation Project”. The objective was to interrogate the issues emanating from the Accra Confession, share our experiences from within our different historical, social, economic, political and theological contexts; and to seek common understanding of the complexities of the challenges confronting the church. Our hope is to build consensus on the basis of our shared faith, presenting shared convictions and a common testimony to the ecumenical church and the world of which we are a part.

The project became unique for two major reasons: first, we are the only churches from the South and the North to have so directly engaged one another in this sustained manner on the issues raised by Accra; and second, the two churches, apart from sharing the Reformed tradition, shared a common theological history and legacy in the Barmen Declaration and the Confession of Belhar, to covenant against the theological immorality of the situations into which they emerged.

The Barmen Declaration (1946), was the faith response of the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany to the idolatry espoused by the Nazi ideology. The Confession of Belhar arose out of the struggle of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church to seek God’s will in the struggle against racism, for unity, justice and reconciliation within apartheid South Africa. The Barmen Declaration became a formal confession of the Evangelical Reformed Church in 1946. And the Dutch Reformed Mission Church made the Confession of Belhar a standard of the church in 1986. It is today the fourth confession of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa.

These two confessions proved to be extremely efficacious, important and inspiring for the churches involved and made a significant contribution to the larger ecumenical discourse. For both the churches involved the historical contexts of these two documents represent situations where the church judged that the integrity of the Gospel was at stake, the faithfulness of the church tested and the call for confession unavoidable. Moreover, there is an undeniable historical and theological continuity that runs from Barmen to Belhar and to Accra in which the themes and motifs resonate clearly and in the new situation described by Accra calls for the same resolute acts of faith from the churches. In a special way therefore, as these two churches grappled with each other and with Accra, these two confessions of faith shaped our engagement with the issues, our reading of different situations, our application of the insights from scripture and the Reformed faith traditions, and our search for common understanding.
Our task teams did not escape the difficulties accompanying the Accra debate in the discussions among our churches. Historical contexts, ongoing situations of immense contrast in terms of everyday experiences, wealth and poverty, subjection to the vagaries of economic pressures, natural and human-made disasters, militarism and arbitrary inflictions of the scourge of violence and war, create chasms that are not always easily overcome. From among all these pressures, perhaps the most intensely emotional issue to arise in the ongoing debates and discussions, was the concept of “empire”.

As Hans-Wilfred Haase so correctly stated, “We must engage it. We must search for answers. In argument and counter-argument we must find our position.”

It has come to encapsulate the differences in perception, contexts and responses to globalisation from churches in the North and the South. Driven by the need to truly understand the origin and meaning of these tensions and convinced that the emotions clouding the issue should not fog our judgement nor hamper our desire to take the debate forward in meaningful ways, we spent much time on this in our discussions. After six months of patient, open, honest discussion between the two groups, we have come up with a way to speak about empire that for obvious reasons of time and space for critical discussion we believe is broader than the way the Accra Confession speaks of it, and also opens up the way for further discussion ecumenically.

We speak of empire, because we discern a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power in our world today. This is constituted by a reality and a spirit of lordless domination, created by humankind. An all-encompassing global reality serving, protecting and defending the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged people, while exploiting creation, imperiously excludes, enslaves, and even sacrifices humanity. It is a pervasive spirit of destructive self-interest, even greed – the worship of money, goods and possessions; the gospel of consumerism, proclaimed through powerful propaganda and religiously justified, believed and followed. It is the colonization of consciousness, values and notions of human life by the imperial logic; a spirit lacking compassionate justice and showing contemptuous disregard for the gifts of creation and the household of life.

Using this “definition” as the starting point we then found it immensely rewarding to discuss those matters raised directly in Accra, and even those matters Accra could not focus on given the time restraints, as the report will show.

It is perhaps important to emphasize that we would not have been able to bridge the initial gulf between us and the inherited tensions from the heated debates between North and South, if it had not been for the bonds we share in, and the claims we inherited from Barmen and Belhar. Dirkie Smit summarized it eloquently: “Both were documents of the church, not of individuals; both targeted false doctrine, not specific people; both were binding and authoritative and not optional, not mere theological opinions and contributions to a discussion, born in a status confessionis, a moment of truth, when the gospel itself was at stake, according to those who confessed. Both therefore did not cause the crisis but were responses to an already existing crisis.”

In the claims of these confessions about Jesus Christ and in the claim of Jesus Christ upon the church and the whole of our lives; in the obligation to hear and trust and obey these claims; in the obligation to discern idolatry and to learn a common language of freedom – in all these realities our churches were bonded together, obligated to understand what really was at stake. It was a humbling, enriching and rewarding experience. In the end, the issue was not “empire” but whether the churches at Accra, “as seekers of truth and justice, and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people”, saw correctly “a current world (dis)order rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire”, and in our view also perpetrated by the empire.

So, enlightened by our historical experiences and the devastation of idolatrous claims by world powers, guided by our understanding of the scriptures and heartened by the testimonies of our churches in Barmen and Belhar, we searched for ways to discover the heart of all matters at stake here. The appeal upon us emanating from the Accra Confession was in many ways as compelling. As Hans-Wilfred Haase so correctly stated, “We must engage it. We must search for answers. In argument and counter-argument we must find our position…” And as in the ‘moment of truth’, uncovered for us in Barmen and Belhar, “it became clear that the problems about which we speak are our problems, whether we live in Bremerhaven or Cape Town”.

In light of this we were able to forge for ourselves an understanding of “empire” in both its empirical reality and its ideological claims in its manifestation historically and also in our world today.

Within this framework, we could then speak of the history of empires and their impact on the world and its peoples over five centuries. We could discern their essential characteristics and the way they worked. We could understand better the presence and workings of the powers at work in these empires and the response of persons of faith to their overwhelming presence. Within this context too, we came to understand what Swiss theologian Karl Barth called “die herrenlosen Gewalten” (the lordless powers) – powers that by their very existence
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challenged the power of God, in fact put themselves in place of God, denied and sought to nullify the purposes of God in the lives of humanity and in creation. That framework enabled us, simultaneously, to discern the ongoing existence and workings of those powers in our own historical situation, and helped to shape our response as people of faith who call Jesus Christ “Lord” and who seek a life in fullness for all humanity and for all God’s creation.

Reading this report within this framework, we hope the reader too will better understand the issues raised in Accra and why we found it necessary to sometimes go beyond those issues in our efforts to help our churches understand and respond – in the ecumenical language that serves as guidelines for our own thinking in this report: to see, judge and act.

It was extremely gratifying and encouraging to note the positive reaction to this understanding of empire from WARC member churches in their “Global Dialogue” meeting in Johannesburg, September 2009. Clearly our approach helped the churches to respond better to the question that had caused so much controversy since the General Council meeting in Accra. In response to this conversation at the Global Dialogue, two articles in separate secular newspapers in South Africa dealt with the debate on empire, quoting extensively from this definition of empire and hence made clear that handling the matter in this way is an open gateway to understand the churches’ struggle with these matters as a concern recognized by and shared with civil society.

With these considerations as overall context, this report starts out with an exposition of the theological views underlying our thinking, where the reader will once again discover the meaning of the historical continuity and continuing presence of Barmen and Belhar as well as recognize the Reformed theological truths that are foundational for our reflections throughout this document. We discuss the concept and reality of globalisation and make the distinction between globalisation and globalism so helpfully suggested by Charles Amjad-Ali. The process of and neutral process, but ideologically driven in the service of the rich and powerful, globally”.

We discover how much Calvin teaches us about Christian faith and justice in the economy and this is followed by the history of empires and their essential characteristics and how those realities are unfolding in our world today, as correctly identified in the Accra Confession. Economic issues follow next, dealing with financial markets, finance regulation and trade. We let the reader share in the prophetic discernment in 2007 that foresaw the financial crisis of one year later and its impact on the world financial systems. This is followed by reflections on consumerism both as economic reality and spiritual challenge to people of faith. As guided by Accra we then speak of ecological responsibility and justice and raise amongst others the matter of climate change. We also pay attention to the all important discussion of food and water crises and their ramifications, both in terms of ecological challenges, human rights crises and challenge for Christian churches. Since globalisation’s impact on women has to receive special attention, we next turn to globalisation and gender justice.

Even though we did not have nearly enough time to properly deal with the next crucial issue we do call attention to globalisation and militarism and raise questions about a Christian response to war in a globalized world. We close this report with a reflection on our ethical stance as churches and individual Christians: How do we see, judge and act? What should be our response to the claims of the lordless powers? How do we witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the redeeming work of Christ and the empowerment of God’s Holy Spirit in the life of the church and in our personal lives?

For the members of the Globalisation Task Teams this has been an extraordinary experience. As we have stated before, the process we engaged in was not at all an easy one. But it became a process of listening and hearing, of learning and unlearning, of dialogue and discovery; of understanding...IT BECAME A PROCESS OF LISTENING AND HEARING, OF LEARNING AND UNLEARNING, OF DIALOGUE AND DISCOVERY; OF UNDERSTANDING ANEW THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT AND ECUMENICAL SOLIDARITY WHEN SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS TO COMPLEX AND VEXING ISSUES.

globalisation, we say, is an historical, rational phenomenon, the product of technological, civilizational development. It inaugurate a new phase in our history, bringing new opportunities but also new risks, presenting humanity with immense challenges, but working for the larger socio-political virtue. Globalism, in our view, is an ideological phenomenon, an ideology in the service of a certain hegemon, driven by neoliberal capitalism. In this sense, globalisation as globalism, as Christi van der Westhuizen has made clear, “is not a benign

aned the meaning of Christian commitment and ecumenical solidarity when searching for answers to complex and vexing issues. Discovering what we inherited and held dear together overcome the chasm of South and North and opened new possibilities for working together with the aim of serving the ecumenical church, and strengthening our witness in our societies and in the world. We are deeply grateful to our respective churches for affording us the opportunity to do this work, and we present this report to our churches with the hope
that it will constitute a firm stepping stone to take this all-important ecumenical discussion further.

We wish to thank every member of the task team for their labour of love and commitment during the past three years. They came from different walks of life, representing different disciplines, and gave freely of their time, energy and vast reservoirs of knowledge to make this project possible. A word of thanks especially goes to those colleagues who were not strictly speaking members of the task teams of the two churches but who were so generous in their commitment to the project. Charles Amjad-Ali became deeply involved in helping to prepare the final manuscript and Alasdair Heron as well as Ulrich Plüddemann and his team took responsibility for the translation work. A special word of thanks goes to the donor of this project, Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED) and Evangelischen Missionswerk in Deutschland (EMW) whose generous financial support enabled the work of the various teams. We are grateful.

In Genesis 50 Joseph dreams of the time when God will “bring (the children of Israel) up from this land…” Joseph knows that he himself will not live to see that day, but still he dreams of its coming, and presses his brothers to then “carry my bones up from here”. Such was his faith in the faithfulness of God. Likewise this generation will not see the things we dream of in this book. We will not all live to see the turnaround on economic and ecological justice we call upon people of faith to work for. Nonetheless our work is inspired by the faithfulness of God who is with us in our struggles and we continue to dream of that day as if we can already see it coming. Hence the title *Dreaming a Different World*. We do not dream of that world as if it must roll in on the wheels of inevitability. We dream it actively, after the example of Martin Luther King Jr., believing it shall dawn, because we are responding to God’s call for justice for humanity and the earth. This is the spirit in which we offer our work to the churches.

We pray that this work may serve as a model for other churches to follow, that genuine dialogue may flourish, ecumenical solidarity may prosper and the witness of the church for justice, equity, human dignity and care for the earth may be heard throughout the world. We offer these reflections with the hope that the churches, indeed, all people of faith, will find some inspiration to do what is necessary. “Hope”, Jonathan Sacks writes, “is the belief not that God has written the script of history, that God will intervene to save us from the error of our ways or protect us from the worst consequences of evil, but simply that God is mindful of our aspirations, with us in our fumbling efforts, that God has given us the means to save us from ourselves; that we are not wrong to dream, wish and work for a better world”. Indeed, we dream a different world.

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A NEW VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD: AN ETHOS OF JUSTICE, CARE AND COMPASSION FOR ALL PEOPLE!
CHAPTER 1

Justice, mercy and humility:
The Churches’ Response to the Challenge of Globalism

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS

1. This document, in which two Reformed churches confess their faith in the triune God, in the face of the challenge of globalisation, is the product of an ecumenical process sparked by the Accra Confession of 2004. At Accra, “Globalisation as a challenge to the churches” was irrevocably taken up as an urgent focus of a confessing process (a processus confessionis) within the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) – following through on earlier initiatives at Kitwe (1995) and Debrecen (1997). Two of the WARC member churches, the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, who have been in a vibrant North-South partnership from the days of the ecumenical struggle against apartheid, decided to “covenant together” in search of a responsible Christian reaction to the challenge of globalism. Since 2006 these two churches have been actively engaged in the so-called Globalisation Project through various consultations in South Africa and Germany. In an intense and intensive process they have been searching together to find ways of faithfully confessing, and living out in the world at large, the truth of the Gospel, in a joint response to the call of Accra.

2. We distinguish the almost inevitable historical process of “globalisation” (of the world becoming one market of ideas and goods, easily and rapidly accessible), from the ideologically questionable process of “globalism” driven by the self-interest of powerful individuals, corporations, nations and power constellations. The latter process leaves behind large sections of the world population in the process of “development”. Globalism is thus seen as the uncritical and deliberate acceptance of the neo-liberal ideology of profit at all costs, limitless growth and development, and powerful manipulation of finance and trade within a so-called “free market” – without any regard to the consequences to people and to the earth. This deliberate ideological control of the processes driving globalisation thrives on the greed and self-interest of the powerful elites (both in the North and the South) manipulating the world economy and the production and distribution of wealth globally to their own benefit. It is against this “empire” of collaborating powers that the Accra Confession testifies. Our joint report is a contribution towards Accra’s call of entering a process of raising awareness, of educating ourselves, of confessing our faith in Jesus as Lord, devising action plans. It is a product of our two churches joining this ongoing processus confessionis.

3. This contribution is the spirit of confessing our faith, similar to the Barmen Declaration in the time of Nazi Germany confessing our one Lord, Jesus Christ, against the idolatry of Nazism. And the Belhar Confession called the church to its tasks of unity, reconciliation and justice in church and society in the face of the heresy of blatant racism in apartheid South Africa. It is, however, also done with the realisation that for the first time a call is made to the world ecumenical movement to participate in a confessing movement that addresses the very system that generates and drives the world economic markets globally. Without reverting to apocalyptic language, we wish to search for ways in which we can transform a process which now seems to function as an idolatrous empire. This task is indeed an enormous “challenge to the churches”. Since it is also a task that transcends the borders of merely being church and minding our own faith business – a task that thus jeopardises a neat separation of church and world – we not only address church members, but wish to “speak truth to power” by stating clearly what we see and judge as wrong and sinful in globalism. We therefore also wish to energetically prophesy an alternative vision based on more liberating, more humane values, for the future of humanity and all creation.

4. Our process of “covenanting together” has deep theological roots which should not be confused with the underpinnings of “political pacts” between two partners agreeing on some points of utility or common interest, or a “social contract” for the common weal. Coming from the Reformed tradition, we believe that we share in God’s covenant, in God’s active involvement in history from the times of God’s covenant with Noah, Abraham, Hagar, Moses and others, as guarded and interpreted by the prophets. Our participation in God’s love for the world is guaranteed especially by the new covenant, based on the life, death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is through the covenant made in his blood that God blesses the world, which becomes accessible to the whole world through the life and witness of the church in the world. Our covenanting together in our joint witness for justice, peace and integrity of creation is thus based on deeply shared convictions about God’s will for our lives on this planet. These convictions deal with God’s work in and through history, God’s love for the whole world, and the effects of God’s covenant for all God’s people and all God’s creatures all over the world.

5. The road that we have travelled together, and the process in which we engaged jointly, was indeed a process of give and take, of speaking boldly and listening respectfully, of reformulating old truths and discovering new ones, of surprising ourselves and being surprised by our partners. In spite of our shared traditions (the Word of God, the Reformation, Barmen, Belhar) and a long road of faithful partnership (as against the ungodly practice of apartheid), the trans-national, global
agenda of Accra, dealing with an all-encompassing system which seriously affects the common weal worldwide, challenged our partnership and dialogue skills to the utmost. However, through perseverance, mutual respect and patience in working through our different contexts and perceptions, and through the presence and guidance of God’s Spirit, we came to agreement on our theological points of departure, their application to the situation and to formulating action plans for our churches.

6. Typical of how perceptions and attitudes can change in such a process one of our members’ witness to his synod in Rekum, Germany, on 14 November 2009, under the theme Church in global responsibility is a telling example:

“When I was called to serve on the globalisation team of our church, I had little more of an idea of this topic than the average politically interested person around... Globalisation...was but one amongst many others, even though perhaps in view of my everyday activities also a bit exotic. It was little more than a slogan – a word on everybody’s lips without it being quite clear what was meant by it. This perception of mine changed considerably through the process. The conversations and discussions in the Globalisation Project contributed to this, especially the personal encounters in South Africa, the direct experience of the situation there during two journeys. The theme of globalisation was everything but an exotic one! We are all directly influenced, also when it is not yet so directly apparent [in our European context] as in many countries from the Southern hemisphere. We are growing together as one world in an irreversible process. That is unavoidable. But this process may not be left to its own devices, especially not in its economic consequences; it must be structured legally and politically. It may not be allowed to simply steamroll over everything which previously determined our human condition, like a hurricane. It is a must for us to find answers how this process of globalisation can be structured in such a way that the right to life of human beings and all of nature not be trampled under foot; that the dominant powers in technology and politics not simply have their way at the expense of the weakest.”

7. This is indeed the challenge: engaged Christians simply cannot sit by idly to wait and see how globalisation will work itself out. It is not an innocent and benign process as the hyper-globalists would make us believe; it is not a myth as the sceptics would have it; it is an enormously influential and deliberate driven process, the outcome of which can be even more devastating than the recent collapse of the world markets. It is a process that must be transformed through an alternative vision and radically different values than the ones presently at work in the global economy. As Reformed Christians we derive our vision, inspiration and values from the truth of the living Word of God. The confession of the triune God spans our whole life: the creative abundance of God the Creator; the saving and liberating life and work of Jesus, our Lord, especially his incarnation, sacrificial death and resurrection; and the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our confessional traditions help us to interpret new contexts and situations. From the final reality of God’s Kingdom, God’s reign, God’s love and active involvement in history – leading the whole of creation towards its goal or telos – all historical events receive an eschatological mode of existence. The three-fold office of prophet, priest and king, instituted in the life of biblical Israel, and fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus Christ, also guides the church in its service towards God’s rule in the world. The values or the principles of God’s love, truth and justice guarantee and sustain God’s peace and the integrity of the whole of creation. Through the work of God’s Spirit, God’s image is being restored in us and we become instruments and partners in God’s restorative work in the world.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBALISATION AND GLOBALISM

8. In our deliberations we were led by biblical perspectives, theological foundations, confessional traditions and socio-ethical values based thereon. These perspectives will also guide us in spelling out ethical consequences and practical action plans for our churches. In spite of overlap in some of these perspectives, we shall order our foundations for “seeing” and “judging” globalism, and “acting” upon it, as follows:

Biblical perspectives

9. A first perspective from the Bible is the fact that creation as such is based on God’s free and affirmative decision to bring into being all that exists. Following the story of Genesis we can say that the eternal God took pleasure in creation, in calling forth this world with mountains, rivers, natural resources, plants, animals and human beings, and declaring this creation “good”. There is no hint of dualism, of creation or materiality being less worth than “spirit”. God’s Spirit in fact guided the material processes from the beginning. God created human beings out of the earth and breathed into them the spirit of life (ruach). The human was created in God’s image (imago Dei), and called human beings to be partners, with co-responsibility in taking care of this creation “garden of delight” and allocating names and meaning to the rest of creation. In spite of inexplicable sin, disobedience and own willfulness of the human beings, God confirmed, again and again, God’s determination to elicit human reciprocity and to steer the historical process through grace to its “end”.

10. In various ways God initiated covenants with people called to partner with God’s governance of worldly and human affairs: with Noah, Abraham, Hagar, Moses, and kings, such
as Josiah. Through Moses God provided the Torah, God’s law which spelled out God’s rules for fulfilled living, for knowing evil and for guiding all aspects of human life, politically, economically and socially. The law was foundational for God’s critique, through the prophetic office, of wrong ideas about what it meant to be the people of God, such as a selfish accent on exclusiveness instead of being a medium of God’s blessing to

all, to the whole world. This critique frequently also targeted the functioning of the other institutions in the household of Israel, the priestly office and the kingly office, with these seats of power easily being abused in favour of elites, or the own group, or the own nation.

11. The whole of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets and Writings) testifies to the fact that the God of the covenant is a God of justice, a God with special concern for the poor, the oppressed, the widow and the orphan, the marginalised and the foreigner. In the Deuteronomic version of the Law, God is described as follows: “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just” (32:4), and as “God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes” (10:17). This God “defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing” (10:18). A typical prophetic passage comes from Amos 5, where the prophet castigates the people: “You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground… You hate the one who reproves in court and despises him who tells the truth. You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain…You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts” (Amos 5:7, 10-12). A telling example from the Writings is Psalm 85:10 where it is stated: “Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and kiss each other”. The logic of God’s covenant is that “shalom” is the outcome of a process in which love and compassion acted out in truthfulness, constitutes God’s justice for all, which sustains peace and fullness of life. The office of prophet functiones to ensure that truth and justice prevailed in the establishment of a covenantal nation, a nation living through reconciliation brought about by sacrificial dedication to God’s Law in religious life, civil life and politics, and in the kingly administration of God’s just rule: that the poor not be oppressed and the rich and powerful not dominate public life.

12. Other examples from the old covenant also emphasise the intricate closeness of God’s justice, compassion and truth. The proclamation of the Jubilee was intended as a sign that hopeless socio-economic situations could be changed from time to time, to give all people new hope and new opportunities to a fulfilled life. The righteousness of God’s reign was to be measured at the fringes, the margins of society. Various reform movements within the life of the people of the old covenant, such as the comprehensive legal reforms in the time of King Josiah or the post-exilic political and cultic reforms of Nehemiah and Ezra, present readers of all epochs with fresh impulses to rethink what the covenant with God really entails in specific situations and new contexts. This spirit of human involvement and reform of systems that exclude people from flourishing inspired the Reformers and inspire us. The poetry and wisdom of the Old Testament sing the praises of the God of love, justice and truth, and God’s people are urged to live their lives in integrity: seeking God’s justice compassionately and truthfully.

13. The life and work of Jesus, central to the New Testaments’ message, clearly links up with the prophetic focus of the Old Testament as evidenced by Jesus’ sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:18 ff.), spelling out what his ministry was about. Jesus quotes the first verses of Isaiah 61 where a new vision of freedom from shackles is announced, giving hope to prisoners and other marginalised people; the vision of Jubilee wherein all debt is forgiven:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon 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”.

The Gospels all add special accents to the understanding of the meaning of Christ’s life and message: Mark the decisive and urgent action of Jesus through word and especially deed to inaugurate the new reality of God’s rule over all powers; Matthew the fulfilment of the Torah and the prophets in all aspects, with an emphasis on Jesus’ words and teachings, with the sermon on the mount and love of the neighbour, especially “the least” whom he calls his family at the centre; Luke the encompassing work of the Spirit, applying and extending the salvation brought about by Christ in and through the new community in the world, breaking down former barriers between and amongst people and cultures; John the centrality of the love of God and humanity’s need to reciprocate that love in love for the neighbour.

14. With Pentecost the work of the Spirit constitutes the new people of God. The church is being called to be a new community based on faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, bringing all the promises of the old covenant to fulfilment and initiating the kingdom of

THE POETRY AND WISDOM OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SING THE PRAISES OF THE GOD OF LOVE, JUSTICE AND TRUTH, AND GOD’S PEOPLE ARE URGED TO LIVE THEIR LIVES IN INTEGRITY: SEEKING GOD’S JUSTICE COMPASSIONATELY AND TRUTHFULLY.
God, its rule and its righteousness. Through the work of the Spirit the church (as individual believers, as congregations, as denominations, as ecumenical body of Christ) is made an instrument proclaiming, embodying, living, and celebrating God’s justice and peace in the world.

15. Paul, the missionary of the new Christian faith, builds and keeps together new congregations on the message of grace, faith and Christ alone, explaining how the Spirit works through each individual, through the gifts of the Spirit, to build up the body of Christ in the world, bringing hope of a new heaven and a new earth in which God will be all in all. Central concepts, fruitful for a theology of the church in the world – a “public theology” – are the close relation between the message of grace (kerygma), its implementation in the communion of love (koinonia), also strongly emphasised by Luke, and the service and care of the other, especially the needy and marginalised (diakonia). These elements of Christian living in the world are all bundled together in the liturgy of praise towards the God of all life (leitourgia), which takes place in worship, but especially also in all daily activities. An aspect of Paul’s vision for the church which particularly inspires us as churches from the South and the North, is his typification of our ministry as a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-20). We belong to one body, bound together by the reconciliation brought about by Christ, bringing new hope to a world not knowing the secret of reconciliation, unity and justice for all.

Trinitarian perspectives

16. A number of these biblical accents and perspectives have been and can be made theologically fruitful in attempts at relating God and our world, in applying the Gospel in concrete life situations and challenges such as the new challenge of globalisation and globalism. What binds these perspectives together is our belief in the God of the Bible. On the basis of the cloud of biblical witnesses, we as partnering churches live our daily lives, witness in the world and are also reflecting theologically on what it means to believe in this God of the Bible. To understand what the Bible says about God we believe we should understand God as trinity. In the Reformed tradition the doctrine of the trinity plays a decisive role in such theological reflection. In this regard, Calvin and the other reformers followed scripture by emphasising how the story of God’s involvement in the world was told and how this story unfolds in actual reality. These reformers were not interested in prying into the secret life of God, the so-called immanent Trinity. They understood God’s work in history as a reflection or extension of God’s work ad intra, God’s true inner being. The communion between God the Father and the Son, in and through the Spirit, created in freedom the enormous diversity of an expanding cosmos, including our small planet Earth, and everything that takes place here in space and time. When we relate God to our world and history we need to always combine these three aspects of this God by simultaneously distinguishing the work of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

17. God the heavenly Parent is the Creator, Adam, the human being, was created from adamah, this earth. Adam is to live a life in close proximity with this earth and all other beings borne by it. Out of sheer love and joy the Creator called forth our reality and being called forth Abraham and the people of faith covenanting with them, liberating them from oppression, guiding them to become a people giving them the Torah of life. God provided them with prophets to help them understand the wide-reaching implications of this law for themselves and for all people who should share in their blessings of following the truth of this way of justice and peace. In spite of the establishment of the offices of prophet, priest and king, the prophetic critique of the selfishness and sin of leaders and followers, the priestly-kingly status quo with its oppressive structures and power relations a new covenant was needed, This covenant was to be engendered by God’s Spirit in the heart and brought about by the Logos, God’s Son in the flesh.

18. In the Logos God the Son, God’s saving, healing and liberating grace was incarnated and acted out in human history in a decisive, once and for all manner. So that God’s righteousness, being so established in our midst could now be applied, appropriated and extended into our own lives and into everything we think, say, plan and do. Both Belhar and Accra accentuate the incarnation of the Logos, of God’s Wisdom, in the flesh, identifying as deeply and concretely as possible with the sinners of this world. Christ came to us as the suffering servant, as the fatherless son of young single mother, as the God who identifies with the despised, the marginalised, as the one who would also be rejected and crucified outside the city, and via this route of utter humiliation be resurrected as Lord. Phil 2:5-9 summarises this Christological perspective for our lives as follows:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even the death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

19. The image of God in us can be restored, through the work of God the Spirit in and through us as God’s children, friends and partners. Within a Trinitarian theology it is clear why the saving work of Christ must become internalised in our spirit
so that our spirit would affirm what God had done and make
us available and willing dwelling places for God’s presence.
Through the Spirit God dwells in us, works in us, frees us
from the inside, willingly, from sin and the grip of greed and
selfishness, and opens us up to become a new humanity, people
who live by reciprocity, love, respect, and the gifts of the Spirit.
Through the work of the Spirit Christ’s sacrifice becomes more
and more our own reality so that through the renewal of our
minds we present our bodies as holy, living liturgies in praise
of the Creator, Saviour and sustaining Spirit of the world.
Through the Spirit’s work, in the individual, in the body of
Christ and in unpredictable ways in the whole wide world, the
righteousness of Christ is given concrete form, expansion, and
application in the world of culture, economics and politics.

Ecclesiological perspectives

20. There are various “paradigms” in which we can speak about
the church. These perspectives are important for any public
theology which intends to provide guidelines for church action
in the world as in the case of “covenanting for economic justice
and the integrity of creation”, as called forth by Accra. In our
discussion of the church’s role in this complex globalised
world today, the following perspectives, amongst others, were
identified as potentially helpful in reflection on what it means
to be a prophetic, caring and exemplary community of love
and justice in the world: the church as the body of Christ with

THE IMAGE OF GOD IN US CAN BE RESTORED, THROUGH THE WORK OF GOD THE SPIRIT
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various members serving and supplementing one another in
love; the church as a communion of saints in which the various
gifts of the Spirit are practised to create fullness of life for all;
the church in its witness to unity, reconciliation and justice;
and the threefold office in the church which will be explored
in more detail. As in the Old Testament (in the life of the
people of God), and in the New Testament (in the ministry
of Jesus Christ), the church also took over the threefold office
of priest, king and prophet in the fulfilment of our vocation in
the world.

21. Under the rubric of the priestly, the aspect of justification,
of basing community on atonement, forgiveness, of creating a
community based on love, care and reconciliation, is central.
Christ as the Lord, as the “very God”, humbled himself as a
slave to do the work of atonement. In his priestly office Jesus
Christ the servant deals with the sin of pride, according to
Karl Barth, and especially with humanity overreaching its
limits. This clearly applies to the contemporary globalism, a
hubris which is destroying both human community and God’s
creation. Christ unmasks this pride and achieves justification
based on this grace. In Christ, sin, nestling in pride and
selfishness, should be exposed, fought and eradicated, and its
divine reconciliation. This is done by checking all abuse of
power; by raising the voice of the voiceless; by empowering
the weak; by restoring dignity; by scrutinising all policies and
political decisions regarding the well-being of people. The
church in its structured decision-making and through the
activities of its members in all spheres of life is deeply engaged
in the just ordering and governance of society, in economic
policies, healthcare, education, housing, water, food and
security – in short: all matters political, economic, cultural,
legal and structural. The Church calls for a “just world order”
in which political control of worldwide structures are brought
under scrutiny of a new ethos of justice and compassion with
enough clout to counter the phenomenon of “empire”, rely
theologically speaking on new visions of “kingdom rule”. What
is needed in the face of the complexities of modern life, is the
realisation that God’s kingly work takes place in opposition to
“the powers”, in service and sacrifice, in justice and truth, in
love and compassion, and in closeness to all who are suffering.
The “king” is the servant of the people, the one who guarantees
human flourishing and life in all its fullness.

22. Under the rubric of the kingly resorts the aspect of
sanctification, of following the example of Christ as “very Man”,
in the way we deal with all earthly matters: fearlessly drawing
the consequences of God’s love, forgiveness and justice in the
areas of politics, economics, and culture. The elders, debating
issues and taking decisions in the consistory, are the paradigm
of kingly administration, of decision-making seeking God’s rule:
“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (Acts 15:28)
The church in its kingly mode like Jesus Christ, resists the sin
of sloth (Karl Barth) and is sent out into the world to actualise

impossible effects in human relations and society countered. In the current
dispensation, as Luther taught us, we are engaged in this battle
simultaneously as justified people and as sinners (simul iustus
et peccator). Another important priestly aspect, especially
important in the debates on globalisation, in which the church
follows its Servant Lord, is service, diakonia: taking care of
the poor, the needy, the helpless, the disabled, the sick, the
dying, the elderly, the widows, orphans, and those in hospital,
and other institutions. In this respect we are reminded of
James 1:21: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure
and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their
distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”
The priestly office represents God’s work of justification,
of dealing with sin, of justifying the sinner and ritualising
Christian life accordingly, for instance through the elements
of liturgy, praise, worship, order and self-organisation.

23. In the prophetic office, the church emulates its Lord as
the true witness, mediator and guarantor of reconciliation

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which is the truth of all truths. The church is sent into the world as a witness to the truth, the actualisation, of divine reconciliation. In its witness the church exists for the world not for itself. In the prophetic office the aspects of truth and justice, of “speaking truth to power” and of public witness find their place. This includes scrutiny of legislation, a watchdog function in politics, concern about human dignity and human rights, prophetic critique of economic injustice, ecological degradation, structural injustices and public sin. As in the Bible, the prophetic office is added to speak truth to all earthly powers, especially to the power constellations which so easily develop between the priestly and kingly functions in society, the elite of priests and rulers who are constantly tempted to use their joint power to manipulate legislation, policies and decisions in their favour or in the favour of their circle or group or even their nation. Against all attempts at manipulating other human beings or God, the voice of Micah still rings out: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Barman, Belbar, Accra – these are prophetic statements and confessions in the face of injustice and irreconcilability with Accra addressing the sin of greed and idolatry: the worship of money and matter.

Eschatological perspectives

24. A crucial perspective for all Christian action in the world is the eschatological proviso under which we live: we are not bringing about the kingdom of God, we are indeed partners in God’s work and we are neither helpless nor without responsibility. But the final outcome, the telos of history, the bringing about of the eschatological reality of God’s final rule over all that is, is not our “task”. We live in the intermezzo, in the period of the Spirit of God, the period between the ascension of Christ and the return in glory. We live in the “already” of the presence of the Lord, but simultaneously also in the “not yet”. We live before the final consummation of God’s history with this world. As Paul writes (Rom 8), creation stretches its neck in eager anticipation of the final revelation of “the children of God”, and the Spirit of God prays fervently in anticipation of the eschaton, smelling as it were, the telos of all God’s work of creation, salvation and sanctification. That is why “the children of God” will do everything in their power to work for the realisation of God’s new polis where justice and peace will embrace. Thus, provisionally as all earthly activity may be but in full anticipation of God’s final reign of love, truth and justice, the children of God are busy erecting signs of God’s rule by prophetically opposing oppressive powers, by taking care of those marginalised, exploited and oppressed, and by working towards new forms of economy and governance that reflect God’s rule of justice. Empowered by the Spirit of God and the example of Jesus, the church of Jesus Christ stands on issues of justice where its Lord stands: at the side of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised – eagerly awaiting and working for the “kingdom of God”.

25. In this long-term vision of God’s coming kingdom or rule it helps to distinguish between the means and the ends. The church, as important as it may be, and the state, as irreplaceable as it may seem, are both “merely” means in God’s economy or household. In the end Christ will hand over the kingdom back to God. In a very real sense all the means predestined or chosen by God such as Israel, the law, the prophets, the priestly service, the kings and their efforts, the church, even the work of the Messiah, are means towards the final establishment of the communion between God and God’s people in the “new heavens and new earth”. The purpose of the whole “history of salvation” is God dwelling with God’s people, God being “all in all”. This is the vision of the kingdom, the final outcome of all the efforts of God’s Spirit: that the love of God will establish a rule of justice that will bring peace that transcends all understanding: a kingdom where there will be no more tears, exclusion, marginalisation – no more “culture of death”. In opposing powers of evil and death, the church can see itself as a means, but also, already, as part of the solution, part of the guaranteed outcome of God’s all-conquering love.

Reformation perspectives

26. During the Calvin 500-year celebrations in 2009, much was rediscovered of this enigmatic and complex reformer. It once again became clear the enormous influence Calvin’s understanding of the gospel had on a Christian understanding of politics, earthly life, the daily life in the polis, the economy, education, health care, human dignity and a fulfilled human life. In spite of the totally new contexts of modernity, much of what Calvin had to say about public life in view of the gospel of Jesus Christ sounds surprisingly familiar, if not particularly relevant to us as we struggle to find fitting theological responses to the challenges of our time. Confronted as he was in his congregation in Geneva with many refugees and exiles, people without homes and without future, Calvin’s life as theologian and citizen was consumed by a search for compassionate justice. That is why he took education so seriously; why new diaconal services were established and why he got so deeply involved in all aspects of public life: social justice, health care, economics, and local politics. For him, Christian life was a longing for justice and righteousness, and the Christian task was to become the kind of person and the kind of people that
are needed in the world to practice love for the neighbour, or in today’s terminology: compassionate justice to people and earth.

27. Calvin’s concern for “structures” and not just the individual conscience in matters of ethics was matched by Zwingli. This structural way of thinking helped pave the way for the insights of social ethics: that the supra-personal structures ordering society, including legislation, corporations and “systems” (such as economic systems determining the functioning of the global economy), needed special theological attention. Zwingli, for instance, addressed the complex issue of profits through capital interests. In a Christian community, he said, this should be avoided since we should willingly provide for the needs of a fellow Christian and the government should actually legislate against profits through interests. The important insight of Accra, that a system or an institution does not have “conscience” and pretends to be functioning in an ethically “neutral” way, builds on these seminal contributions to

Confessional perspectives

28. As children of the Reformation we share the various confessions of the Reformation and a confessing tradition which made it possible for new confessing moments or moments of *katros* to emerge in our history of struggle to live out the consequences of the gospel amongst the many other “powers” that dominate our agendas. Two such famous “moments” shared by our churches were the Barmen Declaration of 1934 with its powerful confession of the Lordship of Christ against the threat, the idolatry, of the Nazi ideology; and the Belhar Confession of 1986, which was adopted by what became the Uniting Reformed Church, against the sin and heresy of the ideology of apartheid, in South Africa. Those involved in the origins of what became the Belhar Confession, stated clearly that without the example of *Barmen*, *Belhar* would be unthinkable. Simultaneously, we must now state that without both these confessional moments in the histories of our

30. The Belhar Confession in which the role of the church of Jesus Christ within a context of blatant racism and oppression in Southern Africa was spelled out, played a major role to wake Christians up to the reality and challenge of unity, reconciliation and justice in the context of the apartheid state. Famous, but also controversial in some circles, was Belhar’s emphasis on the God of the Bible who is “in a special way” the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged. Against all protests Christians from all over the world have accepted this confession of God as their own. This God, according to the Bible, brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to

...THE CHURCH WILL ALSO BE MINDFUL OF ITS OWN RELATIVE PLACE AND ROLE IN GOD’S ECONOMY: THE PROPHET ADDRESSES THE THRONE BUT DOES NOT SIT ON IT.

churches, our positive embrace of the call of Accra would have been impossible. We simply live in and from a confessional involvement in the affairs of the world.

29. In the face of the challenge to the church of all ages to live prophetically in the world, also in times of globalization, we need to avoid two extremes: the arrogance that we are building God’s kingdom through our lofty values and goals, and the timid belief that we are powerless partners, that we cannot change the world at all. The Barmen Declaration helps us to overcome this dilemma in various ways. Firstly, *Barmen* balances God’s announcement of the forgiveness of the hungry, frees prisoners and restores sight to the blind, supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows, and blocks the path of the ungodly. The church trusts, praises, and confesses this God of compassionate justice. The church is also called to follow this God in living a life of compassionate justice, a life of “justice and mercy and faith” (Mat 23:23) in this world. The church belonging to this God, is called to stand where God stands: against all forms of injustice and with the wronged. The church is called to witness against all those in positions of power and privilege who may selfishly seek to use their power not to serve others but their own self-interest by controlling and harming others. The
church is always called to discern anew, in every new moment of crisis, such as in its confrontation with globalism, how unity, reconciliation and compassionate justice should be sought and lived prophetically. Can the victims of history (the destitute, the poor, the wronged, downtrodden, strangers, orphans and widows) see in our lives and actions, in our being church, the face of the triune God of compassion and justice? These are the questions, the perspectives, from Belhar as we struggle with “the challenge of globalisation”, as placed squarely on our agendas by Accra.

31. The Accra Confession of 2004 stands in the Reformed tradition of kairos thinking. This declaration is clearly written in the form of a confessional document, a cry of prophetic protest against the evils accompanying the process of globalisation, driven as it is by a ruthless and ideological faith in the so-called free market economy. The present moment in the history of the global economy, determined by the harsh realities of “empire”, is seen as such a new kairos, asking for prophetic protest:

“The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted. The root causes of massive threats to life are above all the product of an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life and death. We live in a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all.”

The policy of unlimited growth among industrialized countries and the drive for profit of transnational corporations have plundered the earth and severely damaged the environment.”

This neo-liberal philosophy, based on the idea of limitless growth, unrestrained competition and consumerism is unmasked as an ideology of “empire” and thus rejected in typical confessional language, for instance:

“Therefore we reject any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people, does not care for all creation, and privatizes those gifts of God meant for all. We reject any teaching which justifies those who support, or fail to resist, such an ideology in the name of the gospel.”

Calling for a process of confessing, Accra urges all Reformed Christians to get involved in a process of “recognition, education, confession and action”, to which our project is a response:

“We commit ourselves to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God”.

32. During the years of church struggle against apartheid in South Africa, many lessons were learnt about “doing theology from below”. In this, an emphasis on the Exodus motif of liberation from bondage, especially the accent on the view from the margins, with God being specially concerned about the poor, the weak, and the marginalised provided a challenge to our confessional tradition: how to deal with contextual problems. In the South African situation where the church was thus called to become the “voice of the voiceless”, this aspect came to the fore when ecumenical initiatives worked with the marginalised communities to formulate their own “theology” in the context of oppression. In the aftermath of the Kairos Document (1986), the idea of a three-pronged process, of “See”, “Judge” and “Act” was developed and implemented to ensure proper contextualization of the gospel. First, the details of the context must be analysed or “seen”, then it can be evaluated or “judged” for what it is, and Biblical norms can be developed, relevant to the task of assessing which action would be appropriate to the structural sin to be countered, and only then could one “act”. In the face of the complex issues to be dealt with once again in the case of globalism, it would seem appropriate to use these well-tested tools of contextual analysis, assessment and action when formulating guidelines for church action. The Belhar Confession was clearly written from such a perspective from “below” and thus clearly incorporated contextuality into the application of faith.

33. A living tradition is aware of constantly new challenges and contexts to be faced. In our joint journey with Accra it was very interesting to discover how prominent the ecumenical debates about the ecological crisis in the world became. Various ecumenical documents were recently published or issued; all of them address the confluence of the economic crisis and the ecological crisis as part of the problems of the unbridled market economy running amok. Both aspects of our current crisis have the same cause that of the limitless exploitation of the earth’s resources. The simple but misleading formula for success is the following: the self-interest and consumerist lifestyles of the rich and powerful worldwide must be satisfied by higher production levels to match the rising levels of consumption. Even the underdogs of history are encouraged to simply join the global market, to produce more in order to consume more, in order to raise the levels of profits and thus “wealth”. Such a scenario obviously has no concern for the earth and its ecology. The economic injustices of this unrealistic neo-liberal ideology, believe that “all boats will rise when the tide rises” and that “the sky is the limit” to what can be produced and consumed – both being totally false assumptions – thus finds its counterpart in ecological degradation. Both these by-products of economically driven, greed-driven globalism thus share the same causes of over-exploitation of the earth and further marginalisation of the poorest half of the world’s population.

A NEW VISION: CHRISTIAN VALUES AND GLOBALISATION

34. From the preceding paragraphs in which biblical perspectives and various theological ‘models’ for prophetic witness in
the world are briefly mentioned, it is possible to draw some conclusions to the vision and the kind of values which Christians can bring into the debates on the future of globalisation as a process. Only through such a reorientation of direction and values can the extremely negative and miserable consequences for “earth and people” as spelled out by the Accra Confession be addressed.

35. The Biblical accent on human beings created in God’s image is a powerful guarantee of the inherent human dignity of every person on the face of the planet, irrespective of race, colour, culture, gender, sexual orientation or whatever other category of classification. The accent on marginalised people (whether poor, oppressed, sick, old or uneducated), on the God of the poor, on the need for love, care and compassion of the neighbour or of selfless service to others are all in support of a “culture of life”. The gospel is given so that human beings, created in God’s image, may have life in abundance, joy and fulfilment. This is the first aspect of a new vision for the future of the world: an ethos of justice, care and compassion for all people!

36. From the origins in the garden of Eden, where Adam was taken from adamah (the soil of this earth), God’s covenant with humanity or representatives of humanity always included aspects of taking care of creation. Furthermore, God so loved “the world” that God sent the Logos, the Son, so that through the salvation of the children of God the whole creation might live with the hope of a new heaven and earth. God’s economy (oikonomia) includes the ordinary household (oikos), the whole earth (oikumene), the ecology (oikologos – the household of nature), and of course the economy of the world. God’s just management or “economy” includes both aspects of taking care of people and their needs and taking care of nature and its wellbeing. Biblical values for living on this planet are holistic and wholesome for all forms of life. This ecological concern “for all the earth” is an important second aspect of the vision of God’s just economy.

37. As indicated in the section on biblical perspectives above, it is possible to identify a handful of biblical values or fundamental “words”, repeated again and again in pairs and combinations, in both Testaments – all pointing to a totally different and just “global order”. Together they define what is meant by “the kingdom of God and its righteousness”. These include pairs such as righteousness and reconciliation, justice and peace, love and truth, compassion and faithfulness. In the Old Testament the word for covenant love or mercy (hesed) is closely associated with the word for truth or faithfulness or integrity (emet), and both words indicating righteousness and justice (mishpat and zedakah) are linked intimately with the word for peace or wholeness (shalom). In the New Testament the words for justice, mercy and faith (or justice, compassion and truth/true worship) appear again and again in Jesus’ explanations of what the law and the prophets were about. These are the values of God’s rule and of God’s “kingdom”. These values should determine our laws, our economic systems and our national and international policies.

38. In speaking about the church, the body of Christ in the world, and God’s people, key words are emphasized, as Belhar summarised: the church is called to live in unity (fostering oneness and communion), to incarnate a ministry of reconciliation, and to stand for God’s justice on behalf of those at the margins of society and power. To do this work the church is inspired and led by the Spirit of God, and is gifted with gifts such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22). The “values” of God’s just “economy” of the world are thus also God’s gifts to his children and to the world.

39. There should be little doubt that the core value, the core gift of a Christian ethos for the world dwells in the reality of God’s love and compassion for all creatures. What God gives to the world and commands from us is the same: love for the neighbour, both near and afar, the unknown, the stranger, the opponent yes, even the enemy. And the content of this love is care, compassion, justice.

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge… but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.” (Lev 19:18)

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. God is love. Whoever lives in love, lives in God, and God in him.” (1 John 4:11,16)

“Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.” (Isaiah 58:6-8)

40. As Paul explains in Romans 12, these values can only become operational when we are willing to be renewed in our minds, when we are inherently open to a change of orientation, away from the “schemes of the world”. Only then shall we be able to find and live a spirituality for the body, for materiality that will serve the whole body of Christ, God’s entire “economy”.

Therefore, I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:1-2)
The love for the neighbour is the recognition of the oneness of the human race created by God like members of the body.
“Your poor, your needy, in your land…”
Perspectives from Calvin on Economics and Social Ethics

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

1. From the very beginning of John Calvin’s theology and with him the Reformed theological tradition he inspired, it is made clear that economic questions, the issues of wealth and poverty, equality and inequality could not be left to the “inherent logic” of economics. These questions touch on the very basics of the Christian faith. Because questions of faith are intimately related to our way of life, the practical consequences of the decisions we make in these areas become the subject of confession.

2. According to Calvin, not only faith and the church but life itself are in constant need of renewal by the word of God. This renewal is all-encompassing; no dimension of life is left untouched. This emphasis insists that human life is set in relation to the living God. God exists on behalf of humanity untouched. This emphasis insists that human life is set in relation to the living God. God exists on behalf of humanity who in turn lives in the presence of God and for God. Our sanctification is God’s liberating work for the benefit of humanity: to make and keep human life human upon the earth, because God put God’s own life at stake in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Human beings are created to respond to God, the giver and guardian of life with gifts entrusted to us and in this response reflect the image of God within us. Created to respond, human beings understand themselves properly only in their relation to God and to creation around them. For this reason, Accra says “We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself”. We do indeed, with Accra, see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation.

3. For Calvin this relationship obtains special meaning in the relationship with the neighbour. The command to love the neighbour is not a romantic, spiritual escapism. The love for the neighbour is the recognition of the oneness of the human race created by God like members of the body. The human affection which proceeds from the regard we have for the truth that God has joined us together and united us in one body. God wants each person to employ him and herself for the sake of the neighbour so that no one is addicted to their own person but that we serve all in common, Calvin says.

4. Hence Calvin’s conviction that “the name ‘neighbour’ extends indiscriminately to every person because the whole human race is united by a sacred bond of fellowship… To make any person my neighbour, it is enough that they be a human being”.

5. This view has at least two immediate consequences. First, “any inequality contrary to this arrangement is nothing else than a corruption of nature”, which, Calvin insists, proceeds “from sin”. Second, out of this flows the radical critique of the wealthy and the demand for socio-economic justice: “There will be those who would rather that the wheat spoil in the granary so that it will be eaten by vermin, so that it can be sold when there is want… (for they only wish to starve the poor). How true is it that our Lord is mocked by those who want to have much profit”.

6. The church of Jesus Christ lives in a world in which poverty and wealth, justice and injustice can be clearly identified. Right from the beginning the Christian church characterized and defined itself by its defence of and choice for the poor, the weak and the destitute. This was true not just for the local churches in the immediate areas, but it has always had a global dimension. Diakonia, the service of the church towards justice and equity, gives the church its profile.

THE ECONOMY AND BIBLICAL TESTIMONY

7. Economic questions are an important theme in the Bible and accordingly should take central place in the Christian faith. In the Hebrew Bible themes relating to issues of the economy, wealth and poverty, justice and injustice are crucial, e.g., laws of obligations, interest, credit and insolvency, criteria for just action and judgement (cf. Ex 22; Deut 24). The social and religious realities of life were firmly kept intact and together and Israel was constantly reminded to see this from within the reality of God’s faithfulness and mercy, realized in the liberation from Egypt, the Covenant at Sinai and the instructions of the Torah. Israel was called to live in faithfulness to their Redeemer.

8. One of the central rules of economic life was the introduction of the year of the Jubilee or sabbatical year (Lev 25; Deut 15). There a remission of all debts is decreed in order to prevent the continuous accumulation of wealth as well as the debilitating accumulation of debt. In other texts too the economy is seen from the point of view of the poor and those living in dire economic need. The poor have the right to justice (Amos 2: 6), and to the solidarity of the community (Is. 58: 1-12; 61: 1-11). There are specific instructions for reductions and forgiveness of debts (Ex 22: 24; 23: 10-11; Lev 5:7-13; Deut 23:20-21; 24:19-22; Neh 5:1-13). The New Testament tells us that Jesus took up the concept of the Year of the Jubilee as central to his life and ministry (Luke 4:16-19). It is important to note that Jesus expands this statement to include the people of the world, not just the Jewish community. This is what Calvin refers to in the quotation above. It furthermore speaks of Jesus...
Calvin's ethical deliberations on the economy are based on the fundamental determination that all human relations and all human actions are under the dominion of God who is the source of all human communal life.

In the Hebrew Bible “the poor” are the second most prominent theme just after idolatry. In the Psalms and the Prophets the poor are constantly mentioned. In the New Testament every 16 verses speak about the poor and poverty. In the Gospels it is one out of every ten verses; in the Gospel of Luke one out of seven and in John’s Epistle one in five.

9. The early Christian church was deeply concerned with poverty and inequality (Acts 6; 2 Cor 8-9); the treatment of slaves and the conduct of the wealthy toward the poor at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34). According to Paul, the Gospel was at stake in the way the church understood itself. The preaching of the Gospel, communion, koinonia and diaconia were inseparably linked to each other. This became the legacy of the Christian church during the first three centuries. John Chrysostom saw himself as a defender of the poor, called compassion the hallmark of humanity and declared that Christ himself encounters us in the person of the poor.

Calvin on poverty and wealth

10. From his vast body of work on the subject of socio-economic justice, we can only make a small selection to highlight Calvin’s views and show how relevant they remain to our situations in the world today. Calvin’s sermons probably best illustrate the reformer’s views on poverty and wealth. As basic point of departure Calvin argues that it was the treatment of the weak, the poor and the vulnerable in society that determined the value of a political regime. “A just and well-regulated government”, Calvin said in a sermon on Psalm 82:3, “will be distinguished for maintaining the rights of the poor and afflicted”. The call here is not for “Christian charity” that would leave systemic injustices untouched. What is at stake here are the rights of the poor. Calvin is not impressed with outward, superficial morality or political piety of either the wealthy or those in positions of power. His measure for good government was its conduct toward the poor – a conduct measured by political and economic policies that guaranteed justice and the honouring of the rights of the poor, and driven by compassion.

11. In his sermons on Deuteronomy written in 1555 with economic upheaval in Geneva as background, Calvin was just as perceptive and his critical views on conspicuous wealth just as clear: “Almost everyone whose wealth allows him greater expenditure finds his delight in luxuriant splendour”. In such words here as elsewhere, he castigates those who choose a lavish life-style and accuses them of perverting Christian freedom. In 1555, the situation in Geneva was characterized by the beginnings of an economic upswing with the economically well-placed refugees having considerable benefit from it. But Calvin was sensitive to the situation of those who were not in a position to benefit in the same way. He saw the growing social tensions, the problems with the integration of the poorest of the refugees, the housing shortage, poor opportunities for tradespersons and those with no access to money, the debt burdens and the effects of inflationary tendencies.

12. A response is demanded from Christian faith. Calvin’s ethical deliberations on the economy are based on the fundamental determination that all human relations and all human actions are under the dominion of God who is the source of all human communal life. Our individual and communal actions are always carried out in Christian freedom, in thankfulness to God and to the glorification of God. It is this understanding that determines our reaction to the demand for socio-economic justice.

13. In his sermon on Deut 15:11-15 of October 1555, Calvin deals with the Jubilee starting with an explanation of the text, “The poor will always be with you in the land” (vs.11). It does not mean, Calvin explains, a fatalistic resignation to poverty. Resignation in the face of the existence of the poor is more than just carelessness. It manifests a form of unfairness, an injustice. It is, Calvin says, a “self-immunization” against poverty, a sinful effort to avoid being confronted by it. This word is not given in order for us to become complacent but rather to make us do what is necessary to fight poverty instead of merely pontificating about it. Calvin strips poverty from any romantic connotation and calls for its abolition. Deut 15:11 is not to be read as a justification of the status quo but more as a sign of the hardness of human sinfulness, a “secret” that is not meant to depress or paralyze us but rather to inspire us to a life of faithful obedience.

14. Rich and poor do not only live in relationship to one another. They live in relationship to God. Calvin sees wealth as a gift from God that cannot be used as an instrument of power by the rich. The rich have to recognize that in the poor God challenges their generosity and their love for the neighbour.
The poor, on the other hand are challenged to overcome their poverty patiently and not through robbing or cheating. It is, meanwhile, the sign of good government that the rights of the poor are not trampled upon as we see in his sermon on Psalm 82.

15. Beyond all attempts to explain and understand the continuing existence of poverty however, is the call to Christian action. In a very real sense, the poor represents God. They are God’s messengers so that the wealthy, as it were, put into the hands of God whatever they give to the poor. The existence and condition of the poor is a call upon the rich to interpret their own life and existence before the face of God.

16. However, does this line of thinking not lead to an acceptance, even religious affirmation of conditions of injustice? We do not think so. Calvin takes a principled stand, but does what he can within the confines of the possibilities given him in Geneva: he urges for practical, political and economic strategies to alleviate poverty. Houses, hospitals, schools and poorhouses should be built, and he makes it the responsibility of the church. There is no ecclesia without diakonia.

17. Calvin takes the relationship between the rich and the poor even further. There is nothing such thing as the poor, he argues “There is a reason for the Lord to say, (open your hand) to your poor, and to your needy, in your land”. In the church rich and poor meet each other as bound together by the Lord, as such have communion with each other, and together are called to honour God in their lives. While rich and poor are in need of each other, wealth and poverty are paradoxical. Thus the removal of this paradox is the greatest Christian commandment. Calvin tells the community to resist the temptation to divide and classify the church into “rich” and “poor” that allows the poor person to be passed over in silence, to be pushed to the margins, withdrawn from the presence of the wealthy. Encounter, communication, giving, receiving – those are the dimensions of life for everyone before God.

18. The poor and the rich, both with their particular possibilities and gifts, form one living organism in which their communion presents itself as a “spiritual miracle”. Calvin’s idea is that all wealth being a gift of God, is not freely at the disposal of the wealthy but is a good entrusted for sharing with one’s neighbours to the benefit of all. Rich and poor exist in their community and their humanity before God’s eyes.

19. In his sermon on Deut 24:14-18 of 10 February 1556, Calvin expands on the issue of humanity. He speaks of poor people given you the promise of a new land. In all this, the Lord is the giver and Israel receives these gifts gratefully out of the hand of God. Before God we are all poor. We all, regardless of economic status, stand before God as indigent beings to whom the new life has been granted through the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and His crucifixion.

WE ALL, REGARDLESS OF ECONOMIC STATUS, STAND BEFORE GOD AS INDIGENT BEINGS TO WHOM THE NEW LIFE HAS BEEN GRANTED THROUGH THE INCARNATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CRUCIFIXION.

20. The sermon on Deut 24:19-22 of February 11, 1556 continues the theme. Calvin emphasizes five aspects. First, all wealth comes from God. God has entrusted goods to the wealthy to enable them to let the poor neighbour share in their resources. Rich and poor are inextricably connected to each other. Wealth is for the benefit of all. Second, giving connects both the poor and the wealthy with God as the original giver in a covenant characterised by gratitude. The poor are not to appropriate goods by force and the rich are to give willingly. Third: the rich live with the dangers of avarice, miserliness, greed, arrogance and ingratitude to God. These are sins Calvin contrasts with the consciousness that life is a blessing out of the hands of God. Fourth, the concept of communion between rich and poor is rooted in the fact that all are created in the image of God and before God all are beggars. They form a communio sanctorum and a communion of remembrance: you were once slaves in Egypt, is the constant reminder; the Lord has brought you out of the house of bondage, and has
conscience”. However he warns sternly against “the abuse of Christian liberty” through frivolous luxury, squandering of these entrusted goods and avarice. Instead this freedom shall be used for the welfare of others. Delight in the gifts of God, not suspicion, determines his view. Throwing away one’s wealth is no extraordinary achievement, Calvin believes, but the wise use of it and generosity is the yardstick for the proper use of money and property, and once again “Christian love” and “thankfulness” are central.

CONCLUSION

22. The compelling nature of Calvin’s views extends also to the perennial issue of work and a person’s right to employment. “If a person is deprived of labour they are also deprived of the necessary means to live” argues Calvin. It is “as if one had cut their throat… God has ordained that we should work. But is that work denied someone? Behold, that (person’s) life is stamped out!” And it is not just getting a job that matters. It is the quality of work, the conditions of work as well as the benefits for the community at large that should be considered: “It is not enough when we say, ‘Oh, I have work, I have my trade, I set the pace!’ This is not enough; for one must be concerned whether it is good and profitable to the community and if it is able to serve our neighbours”. In other words, it is not just the personal satisfaction and the fulfilment of the personal needs that count. It is the systemic transformation which extends justice to the other that helps society to function better and that helps us to live in the presence of God.

23. We see here how radical John Calvin’s convictions are in his interpretation of the biblical message as he applies it to the political and socio-economic situation of his day. Notice also how Calvin radicalizes the notion of the neighbour to undermine human selfishness and systemic injustices. Then Calvin employs a sentence that shifts not only the paradigm for fighting poverty, but shifts also dramatically the measure of our success in fighting poverty. “It is not enough to know that the poor person has work or receives charity,” Calvin writes, “it is necessary to know whether the poor person is content”. The measurement of what is right is now not found in the satisfaction of the rich in giving, or by the criteria of some human made law; it is found in whether the poor, the wounded, the vulnerable are content. To be “content” is when one’s humanity is flourishing, when one’s dignity is honoured and one’s rights are respected and upheld. It is when the poor have seen with their eyes and experienced in their bodies and in their lives that justice is being done.

24. Calvin is correct in demanding that paradigm shift for all social ethics because all the demands of Jesus in the gospel regarding humanity, justice and righteousness are made within the context of reference to the one, single, irrevocable criterion which we find in Matthew 25:40 and 45 “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least brothers (or sisters) of mine, you did it to me”. For John Calvin, and therefore for those who consider themselves heirs to his spiritual heritage, all this is grounded in the single, immutable truth: “We do not belong to ourselves, but to God”.

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WE BELONG TO GOD AND WE ARE THE PROPERTY OF GOD TOGETHER WITH OUR GIFTS AND POSSESSIONS
THE WORLD SEEN FROM THE EYES OF THE EMPIRE IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THAT SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF ITS VICTIMS
1. We live in a world of harsh inequality, across and within nations, of ecological destruction, resource-driven wars, poverty, disease, and global economic injustices. This unjust global system is defended and protected by political and military might. This is the context from which the Accra Confession of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches emerged.

2. Accra paints a disturbing picture of the contemporary global economic system, arguing that it is grounded in a belief system that idolizes “unrestrained competition, consumerism, unlimited economic system, arguing that it is grounded in a belief system … ownership of private property … capital speculation, liberalization and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and natural resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes and the unrestricted movement of capital.” It further argues that “social obligations, protection of the poor and weak, trade unions and relationships between people are subordinate to the [se] processes of economic growth and capital accumulation.” This ideology “claims to have no alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation. It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance which amounts to idolatry.”

3. Based on the above, the document concludes that the world (including the church) is once more faced with the challenge of empire. “In using the term ‘empire’, the document declares, “we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.” In short, the church today is facing “a new Rome.”

4. The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany, after much deliberation have come to a definition of empire as we have stated in the Preface, but find important enough to repeat at this point. “We speak of empire, because we discern a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power in our world today. This is constituted by a reality and a spirit of lordless domination, created by humankind. An all-encompassing global reality serving, protecting and defending the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged people, while exploiting creation, imperiously excludes, enslaves and even sacrifices humanity. It is a pervasive spirit of destructive self-interest, even greed – the worship of money, goods and possessions; the gospel of consumerism, proclaimed through powerful propaganda and religiously justified, believed and followed. It is a colonization of consciousness, values and notions of human life by the imperial logic; a spirit lacking compassionate justice and showing contemptuous disregard for the gifts of creation and the household of life.

5. It is clear that the Confession’s statement is not meant to be read only as an economic or political critique. It also has theological import, which is clear from the language in paragraphs 9 and 10. Interestingly, however, paragraph 11 – where the word “empire” is used explicitly – it lacks a serious theological consideration. So, three questions arise: 1) Is the Accra Confession right in asserting that we are in fact dealing with an empire and an imperial reality? 2) Can we speak theologically about empire, and is there something in Scripture and the tradition of the church that can help us in this? 3) What should the standpoint of the church be, if indeed we are facing an empire, a new Rome?

6. Answering these critical questions could lead to the development of a theological and missiological position in the light of the radical imperatives of the gospel that could help Christians deal uncompromisingly with globalism and the Empire as the oppressive forces they really are. The concern is to draw out the implications this context has for Christian ethics, witness and mission, and thus theological praxis. Our concern is to come to a clearer and deeper understanding of the inherent relationship between Christianity and the empire (with its concomitant globalism). We are proposing a reassessment of the ethical understanding of the dialectic of the gospel and the world, which is central for the theological episteme based on the missio dei and incarnation itself.

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE POWERLESS

7. The Accra Confession openly reads history “through the eyes of the powerless and suffering people”, doing its theology “from below”, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer proposed in the preface of his enlarged edition of his Letters From Prison. From this vantage point our current world order is exclusively for the powerful, opening up hitherto unknown opportunities for them. However, for the suffering masses it is a disordered, cruel and unjust system of domination and exploitation. This is part of the often unarticulated problem underlying the current tensions in the debate amongst the churches.

8. It is critical to remember what liberation theology emphasized as being of central importance, viz., contextuality: “where one stands” when one analyzes these matters is crucially significant. This is true for both theology and biblical hermeneutics: both for the way in which biblical narratives are being told, and for the way in which those narratives are
interpreted and retold. The context of telling is as important as the context of retelling.

9. The reality of globalisation is unthinkable without the reality of the forces that drive it. First among them is global capitalism, followed closely by military, political and cultural forms of domination. These systems are mutually reinforcing and together they realise the aims of self-interest on behalf of the rich nations and the rich elite in poor countries.

10. Following the analysis of economist/historian Sampie Terreblanche, we can discern five successive systemic periods in Western history since 1500. Each was dominated by a different Western country; the Iberian Empires, mainly during the 16th century; the Dutch Empire mainly during the 17th century; the first British Empire mainly during the 18th century; the second British Empire during the 19th and early 20th centuries; and the American Empire during the late 20th and early 21st century. All the Western Empires were globalising empires. We can also discern two specific periods of globalisation prior to the contemporary one: first, between 1776 (the American “independence”) until 1815 (the Napoleonic wars), and second from 1914 (the beginning of the First World War) to 1945 and the end of the Second World War. The nature and consequences of five hundred years of Western empires are inexplicable if we do not take into account the myths about the alleged superiority of people of European descent and the implicit (and sometimes explicit) myths about the inferiority of non-European people.

11. Outside of this European context however, and during the same period there were at least three other empires, which are not focused upon largely because of the non-European protagonist involved: the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the Mogul Indian Empire and the Japanese Empire in North East and South East Asia.

12. Empires have always been about power and greed and premised on the organisation and exploitation of labour. The globalising empires of the West were unique in two instances: first, their imperial history was closely intertwined with the history of capitalism; and second that they were very closely intertwined with Christendom which unfortunately they confused with Christianity. The former was product of a Constantinian control of faith after the Edict of Milan (311) and the latter was located in the mangers and Golgathas of history. It must also be pointed out that the golden thread that runs through the Western empires over the last five hundred years is that they thrived along with capitalism on warfare, on the preparation for war and on the opportunities of waging war, which opened up other regions of the world for capital accumulation in the conquered non-European world. In the quest for empire capitalism and militarism proved to be symbiotic twins.

13. For the first time the world lives under one truly global empire with no borders. This is now openly acknowledged within the USA across the whole ideological spectrum. There was a time that the word “empire” was considered controversial and anxiously avoided, if not actively resisted, by American politicians and scholars alike. This is because Americans saw themselves as uniquely anti-empire and anti-colonial, distinctly different from their European counterparts. But all this has changed. The media as well as respected analysts on both the left and the right are now referring to “American empire” approvingly as the dominant narrative of the twenty-first century. The military victory in Iraq seems to have confirmed a new world order. “Not since Rome,” observed Joseph Nye, Dean of Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, “has one nation loomed so large above the others. Indeed the word ‘empire’ has come out of the closet”.

14. The policy papers of the US Defence Department, the State Department and the neo-conservative think-tanks that provided the intellectual arguments for the Bush Doctrine were blatantly imperial in their statement of intent and this continues even now. Steven Rose, a founding member of the Project for the New American Century, and the Director of the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, who previously had worked for the US Department of Defence, and the National Security Agency, writes:

The United States has no rival. We are militarily dominant around the world ... Our goal is not combating a rival, but maintaining our imperial position and maintaining imperial order ... Planning for imperial wars is different from planning for conventional wars ... The maximum amount of force can and should be used as quickly as possible for psychological impact, to demonstrate that the empire cannot be challenged with impunity ... Imperial
wars end, but imperial garrisons must be left in place for decades to ensure order and stability ... Finally, imperial strategy focuses on preventing the emergence of powerful hostile challengers to the empire: by war if necessary, but by imperial assimilation if possible.

15. Andrew Bacevich argues that American empire is neither something that was “thrust upon” the US, by historic determination, nor that the US had accidentally “stumbled upon” it. Rather it was the serious and deliberate long-term goal of US administrations throughout the Twentieth Century, from Woodrow Wilson at the beginning, to George W. Bush at the dawn of the new millennium.

16. Thus the Accra Confession and especially the definition we have articulated and expressed already in the preface and in this chapter, is absolutely correct in understanding the imperial power, not only in its effect but also in its design: it is a deliberate project aimed at accruing wealth, influence and military might. To persist in pretending otherwise is a “grand illusion.”

GLOBALISM, GLOBALISATION AND EMPIRE

17. We see globalisation as being distinct from empire, and even opposing it, because globalisation is seen to be based on a certain rationality of pragmatic economics, politics and the inevitable movement of history, rather than as being a part of a hegemonic structure. Globalism became very popular after 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, it was not just an inevitably advancing reality; it was also a triumphalist ideology that was used by the only remaining superpower as a missionary vehicle to further its exclusive imperial dominance over the new unipolar world. At this juncture, the US, for the first time, openly admitted its imperial character. It had been long accused of imperialism and neo-imperialism, at least since 1898 and its annexation of Philippines, Cuba, Guam and Puerto Rico as part of the Treaty of Paris, but it had always denied this and rejected these accusations as ideological slander. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, globalism was seen as the comprehensive victory of capitalism and the liberal bourgeois democratic ideals, embodied paradigmatically by the US.

18. It is imperative that we make a distinction between globalisation, which is an almost inevitable historical process with positive nuances, and globalism, which is an ideology in the service of certain agencies and agendas with negative connotations. Unfortunately, globalisation has been tied so closely to globalism that they have often been confused, one for the other. As a result of that confusion we have not always seen the interests that globalism actually serves and have missed the occasional oppositions between globalisation and globalism.

19. Both globalism and globalisation have expanded in the context of an ever-weakening state structure and the steady erosion of its territorial imperative and sovereignty. Stated very briefly, we see this weakening of the state from both sides. One through the imperatives of access to the market, information, etc.; the other through the imperative of moral normatives, like the spreading discourse of human rights and the further development of international law, as over against cultural, national, and regional particularities. Not that these divisions are clear-cut or simple. While the empires and the market forces acquire more and power for themselves, they ensure that the states within which this power is exercised are weakened. The ideology of the weak state vis-à-vis the market force, while kept operational in the West. These are not the reasons for the weakened states in the South, for in these states the imperial power and the global markets impose their order of which the best example is the structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and IMF.

20. Against hegemonic globalism the emerging moral discourse pushes for the continued importance of difference and identity, even though these are seen quite negatively as a push for “primordial tribal identity-seeking,” even by some liberal thinkers. This dichotomy is starkly exhibited by the dichotomy between the globalism present in the (Davos) World Economic Forum, and the globalisation of the (now regional) World Social Forum(s). In the latter, indigenous, local and third world peoples are getting together to resist hegemonic ideological globalism. On the other hand, we have global moral regimes in place, which are much appreciated by local people, who use them to challenge the use of state power to curb the universal implications of these regimes in the name of local context and politics.

21. The whole international moral discourse which emerged out of the ashes of the Second World War has produced very critical international institutions designed to impede the violence and devastation witnessed in Europe’s two devastating “World” Wars which lasted for a total of 11 years over a 31 years period. Despite the fact that the main protagonists of these two wars were largely European, they have been given global significance, hence the name “world” wars. The fact that these wars were fought by the most “Enlightened” nations, not given to “tribal” or “religious” loyalties and “superstitions” debunks the usual liberal argument that religion is always the cause of war and conflict, and with the growth of rationality we will get over religious and tribal warfare. Therefore the international organizations like the United Nations (UN) founded in 1945, on the back of the League of Nations (1919 to 1946), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the World Council of Churches, both created in 1948, etc., were all dealing with this European crisis.

22. Faced with the contemporary immoralities of globalism, based again in the north Atlantic context, globalisation
began to push for global rules as deontological or categorical imperatives. These were being generated as a part of a genuine discourse on global virtue which is taking place at an international level across the broadest spectrum.

23. Both of these processes have put the state in a political pincer. On the one hand, globalism’s ideological pressure to open markets gives up preferential protections and allows information technology to pervade every level of society. It weakens the ability of states to preferentially protect their citizens, by providing them with job security, healthcare or education, etc., because this violates the global normatives of the laissez faire market. On the other hand, the international regimes challenge states’ parochial foundation in nationalism by countering states’ moral claims to absolute sovereignty. The growth of international moral norms often comes to the aid of sub-national identity groups in their internal struggles against state hegemony, but this occurs at the expense of the unifying discourse of nationalism. So at the very time when the state needs to be strong in order to counter both the workings out of the ideology of globalism and the processes of globalisation, it finds itself undermined by both of these forces.

US EMPIRE

24. When the US walked into Afghanistan on 18 October 2001, it had genuine sympathetic support as well as global recognition of its pain on 9/11, and acceptance of its leadership in the fight against terrorism. This action was seen as having political, moral and ethical grounds and being rooted in international rights-based regimes. The Taliban had been openly violating these rights and were escalating these violations, especially against women, as well as destroying rich Buddhist heritage sites of rich archaeological and historical importance, etc. At this point America was seen internationally as a global moral “policeman” with little challenge to this perceived status. This support for the US even went so far as to shore up an otherwise problematic pre-emptive war and a demand for regime change in Afghanistan. There were few if any serious critiques of this breach of the territorial imperative which had been in place since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), and strictly applied at least since the Second World War, in light of Hitler’s invasion of Poland in 1939 and subsequent developments in international law.

25. Once the US went to war in Iraq on 20 March 2003, all this changed. That was clearly the act of an empire which saw itself above the international law of territorial integrity. As in the old imperial model, in which the emperor as the direct representative of God was above the law, now the very nation which had taken upon itself the role of international moral standard and policeman was the one above these laws, also claiming itself to be the representative of God. It used the argument of a one-time exception under extreme circumstances as a way of developing its role in the world. It argued, falsely, that the causalities that allowed it to walk into Afghanistan also existed in Iraq, vis-à-vis radical Islam, the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The latter, it was claimed, was a major protagonist in Iraq which also had weapons of mass destruction, germ warfare, etc., and thus posed a greater threat to the “world” than Afghanistan. However, despite massive propaganda the US was unable to convince the world. So even though some regimes gave a façade of support to the US’s invasion (often more symbolic than real), large numbers of people across the world criticized the US for its go-it-alone jingoism, its rhetoric of “he who is not with us is against us” and an already perceived dishonesty – a criticism which later proved to be correct.

26. In many quarters, even beyond the Muslim world and the Third World, the US was now openly perceived as a threat to world peace equal to al-Qaeda. The descent into the practice and justification of torture at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib displayed so vividly in those infamous pictures, undid all of the moral commitments and institutions that were put in place after the Second World War. Even respected American human rights scholars such as Alan Dershowitz and Michael Ignatieff cynically and conveniently justified the torture of prisoners at these and other sites on the grounds of the “ethics of exceptionalism.” With the revelation of the CIA’s practice of “extraordinary rendition” and torture, and President Bush’s admission that not only did his office have knowledge of these practices, but was in fact the source of these orders, the US’s claims to high moral standards was thoroughly corroded. That no call was made as a consequence of the illegality of these orders, for the trials and impeachment of the President and his cohorts, is simply incomprehensible, given the US’s claims to high morality and legality. Thus the shift from globalisation of morality to globalism of an empire was complete. There were clearly many critical voices within the US and dominated by critical church leaders and theologians but they were silenced and treated with pejorative disdain. Those voices need to be supported and strengthened.

27. It must be remembered that once one starts establishing exceptions for oneself and justifying them on dubious grounds which are clearly based on self-interest, one is on a very slippery slope which makes enforcing categorical imperatives on others nearly impossible. Unfortunately, exceptionalist ethics have a nasty habit of acquiring the status of a categorical imperative in themselves, so what we treat today as an exceptional ethical context or deed will be applied tomorrow against us, on the basis of the same exceptionalism. (This danger is particularly high in the arena of international law because even now one of its accepted bases is actual practices and custom, the timeframes of which can be a matter of decades as was established during the Nuremberg Tribunal) Once this happens the only way we can make the other do what we want is through the exercise of naked power, because moral arguments no longer function.
This leads to a contagion and escalation of violence, extremism, torture, abuse and overall unethical behaviour, and to the destruction of the social compacts which are the basis of our ability to live together with justice and thus also in peace.

28. It is also clear that even the most seemingly obvious and innocuous concepts, such as that of “the world” depend upon our respective perceptions. We do not live in some abstract and docetic world as the powerful would have us believe. The world seen from the eyes of the empire is very different from that seen through the eyes of its victims. The empire always claims that it represents the world in toto which is offensive to anyone with a wider, non-imperial global perspective. The question is what does such usurpation, obviously not always conscious, mean for those who make such a claim? On the other side, what does this mean for those who are the victims of this self-generated imperial world whose benefits almost totally escape them. How can they own this world? So when we use the term “world” within the globalism/globalisation context, we have to be very cognisant of these and other caveats if not challenges, and must immediately ask who is defining the term world.

FAREWELL TO INNOCENCE

29. In Farewell to Innocence Allan Boesak used the phrase “innocence” to describe the self-destructive childishness which distorts reality, hiding from horrendous oppression and making a virtue out of powerlessness, weakness and helplessness, leading to a helpless utopianism – either an idealisation of the present bad situation or an escapism into a “better” world other than the present one. This phrase is associated particularly with the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. However, it can also be applied to our current global situation, and to the need of the church to respond to that reality.

30. In his book entitled Faith-based War: from 9/11 to Catastrophic Success in Iraq, Walter Herbert explores what he calls America’s “national mythology” that particular religious system “embraced by the Bush administration” that was crucial to its invasion of Iraq. “The myth of American invulnerability was joined to a myth of American virtue, as if the nation deserved the divine favour shown it”. In classical Christian theology, Herbert writes, “Satan hates the goodness of God because it is goodness. Likewise here: the attacks were motivated by hatred of American virtues. Against this shadowy, shape-shifting evil, no evidence is necessary, no debate required; it is obvious to the eye of faith”.

31. Hence George W. Bush could seriously state “We are serving in freedom’s cause, a cause that is the cause of all mankind” [sic], and Michael Ignatieff can proclaim that “America’s empire ... is a new invention ... a global hegemony whose grace notes are free markets, human rights and democracy ... It is the imperialism of good intentions”.

Although the election of President Obama was of extreme historical significance and promised a lot, thus far in actual policies and in the continuation of the war, he has shown no significantly different approach.

32. The belief in the goodness of the empire by those who benefit from it, and the belief that it is therefore good for those colonised and exploited by it, is not new. Cicero said: “Do we not observe that dominion has been granted by Nature to everything that is best, to the great advantage of what is weak?” In the same vein we hear Plutarch saying, “An essential difference between [the Roman empire] and other ancient empires is that the Romans govern free men, not slaves”. This sounds like a serious disconnect from reality but it is no worse than the reality observed by Rosemary Ruether, namely that American national leaders “are often believers in their own ideological rhetoric. They both pursue murderous policies motivated by what they see as American self-interest and also manage to sincerely believe that they are serving the best interests of these colonized and exploited people as well”. All these are clearly echoed in Rudyard Kipling’s White Man’s Burden where the colonisers are noble and gracious people imparting civilization and virtue to the benighted child-like savages.

33. The time has come for Christians to realise that we cannot condone, ignore or suffer from this disconnect. This self-delusion is not only politically problematic; it is sinful and therefore we must expose, confront and resist it, not because self-delusion is a pathological psychological phenomenon but because of its consequences for others. It is this that calls forth our response as those who are saved by the One who was crucified as a victim of the empire.

34. The imperial reality we are speaking of might be an American empire, but it is not America’s alone. It is an empire that is, as the Accra Confession states, “a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations”, a description that served us in articulating a more comprehensive understanding of empire in our definition. German ecumenical theologian Ulrich Duchrow writes that before America’s prominent global role, renowned Swedish sociologist Johan Galtung had already spoken of the European Community as a superpower in the making, led at first by the six former colonial powers but presently led by the power of transnational corporations.

35. According to Duchrow, “[t]he classical period of European imperialism at the end of the 19th century was developed as a hegemonic political and military security system for the foreign investments of European capital in profitable regions of the world.” After the USA took over this role, the present policy of the EU has been to try to establish Europe as a “sub-empire, partly in competition, partly in alliance with the
USA’. In short, Duchrow concludes that “the EU is part of the neoliberal capitalist US Empire, partly competing with the US in this framework”. At present, however, the European churches are “unwilling to face the reality of the EU in the context of global empire.” Why?

36. Duchrow’s “hunch” is that:

Until a short while ago the Europeans could leave the dirty job of protecting Western exploitation of the world’s resources to the USA which up to recently disguised its imperial acts by utilizing proxies. In the shadow of the super power Europeans could do profitable business. Now the USA under the Bush administration, is taking off the mask and acting openly and brutally itself as an imperial power. And furthermore, the EU is beginning to form itself openly as an imperial power. This is shaking the illusion of the West being a social and democratic market society which up to now was the basis for the positive relationship between the churches and the political and economic system and elites. Realizing this reality would bring the churches into basic conflict with the powers of the existing system which they fear because of the privileges they still enjoy in the old pattern of Constantinian church-state relationships.

37. Duchrow describes this stance as an “illusionary consciousness” which makes it hard for the churches to face reality and find “a new ecumenical vision”. In other words, European churches to a great extent share the affliction we have identified in the United States.

38. We speak in this fashion because the US Empire is at the moment the reality we are all facing, and in that sense has become the “face” of the North. As stated earlier, in 1977, Allan Boesak makes reference to “farewell to innocence” which was aimed in the first place at black people, so that the temptation of complicity with the powers in one’s own oppression was clearly understood and articulated. Therefore it is fitting that this warning be sounded once again as clarion consciousness which makes it hard for the churches to face reality and find “a new ecumenical vision”. In other words, European churches to a great extent share the affliction we have identified in the United States.

39. It is crucial for us to realise that throughout the ages imperial reality has been pervasive, ubiquitous, and all-encompassing. It was not merely a military or a political reality; it was above all a religious reality. Religion was not a private, individual matter; it was a civic and public practice, visible everywhere. Imperial theology was the indispensable foundation upon which it all rested. Basic to, and definitive of the Roman imperial theology was the claim that Rome ruled its empire because the gods willed Rome to rule the world.

40. The Roman Empire espoused a worldview, a “myth of supernatural character … beyond military, economic and socio-political bases of power, a religion that identifies and sanctions those who order, rule over, and benefit from the empire, and creates and confirms the subordinate roles and compliant responses of those who are ruled”.

41. Political ideology was formulated in theological terms and expressed through cult and ritual, the centre of which was the emperor, at first the divine instrument of the gods, but later himself a god. Hence the emperor cult in all its manifestations became the public and civic expression, the foundational theological justification and legitimisation of the empire. In the person of the emperor was the divine presentation of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the god-willed submission of the empire’s subjects to an exalted and divinely legitimated emperor. Rome’s power, military might and glory, Rome’s wealth and political wisdom, Rome’s ability and right to rule nations – all of this was personified by the emperor.

42. This was the idolatry the first Christians could not accept and which so much of the New Testament so consistently resisted and showed a critical discernment about it pervasive power. This was the imperial reality in which first the Jesus movement and then the Christian church came into being, in which they lived, worked and testified, and which afforded such enormous significance to the titles that the Christian church accorded to Jesus in the beginning. Not Caesar, but Jesus was Lord. Not the emperor, but Jesus was the true Saviour of the world. It was not true that the emperor held life in his hands; our lives were and are in the hands of the Living One. So, when New Testament writers spoke of Jesus as Lord, it was a direct challenge to the one on the Roman imperial throne who called himself Lord and God. When they called the slaves and people from the lower classes who formed the Christian communities “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet 2:9), it was a direct correction of the empire’s socio-economic stratification and political hierarchy that placed the aristocracy at the top and slaves at the bottom. When Jude ended his epistle with the words, “To the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power and authority, before all time and now and forever” (v 25), he pronounced a scathing critique on Rome’s imperial theology and the emperor’s divine presumptions. So, too, is John of Patmos’s worship of Jesus as “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” (Rev 22:13) A stronger denunciation of the blasphemous claims of the emperor is hardly thinkable.
43. Paul’s famous theological construct of the church in Galatians 3:28 and 29, if read with this in mind, becomes a reversal of the logic of empire, and in marvellous ways he overturns that logic several times. This is not accidental but deliberate; not of marginal importance but critical for understanding Paul and the stance of the early Christian communities. The same is true of the Gospels. Evidence of the imperial presence – and critique of and resistance to that presence – is everywhere if we but care to look. Liberation theology began to probe these possibilities more than forty years ago but finally there is a whole new approach to New Testament studies and theology developing which takes all this into account and opens exciting paths to new understandings of the New Testament.

44. It is with these insights that we must arm ourselves when we think about the challenges of imperial reality today. We should keep in mind that, while emperor worship as such seems to be out of vogue, the identification of the empire with God and God’s will is still very much alive.

45. The idolatry lies not only in the “worship” of consumerism, money and goods, and in the way in which profits are placed above people but also in the way in which America identifies itself with God and goodness as we have seen. This identification with goodness and God almost automatically calls up a conjured reality of evil on the other side. Hence the talk of “the axis of evil”, the “war against evil” and the war on terror as the war to bring “an end to evil”. It follows that there is thus an easy demonisation of others, especially non-white Third World people, and even more specifically the Arabs, which leads to a dehumanised other, an evil presence to be eliminated. And since the enemy is not human, but “evil”, any and all means are justified; there is no possibility for error on the side of those who represent goodness. This theological stance harbours within itself another ideological trait: it closes itself off from all self-criticism or correction. It ascribes to itself an attribute ascribable only to God: that of sinlessness.

46. Globally, we are confronted with an ideology that claims to be all-powerful, without any alternative, and hence without any possibility of challenge or change. “It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance, which amounts to idolatry” (Accra Confession, paragraph 10).

47. The church is called to resist and challenge all these new forms of idolatry, for they have enormous moral, political, economic and theological consequences. We shall have to begin by allowing for a new understanding of the imperial context of the New Testament, and by admitting that the ways in which traditional Christian theology, as shaped by Western European and Euro-American thinking and interpretation, have left us ill-prepared to deal with the theological, political and economic realities that the church is facing today. We need, in other words, a process of “decolonisation”, to help us undo the domestication of Jesus, Paul, and the writings of the New Testament that has proved so harmful in the history of Western Christianity.

48. Firstly, we shall have to explore further the patterns of “reframing and resistance” that Joerg Rieger has identified “from Paul to post-colonial times”. Secondly, we shall have to engage in hard political and economic analysis of our imperial realities today, the manifestations of globalisation and its impact on the world and the communities where we live, work and worship, and on the life of the church. Over against the “false promises” of empire we shall have to proclaim the promises of God in Jesus Christ, which are diametrically opposed to the promises of empire. Thirdly, we shall have to deny claims that the reality of empire is so overwhelming as to be unchallengeable and unchangeable as if it were ordained by divine sanction. Fourthly, we shall have to resist the insistence on our powerlessness. We shall rather have to insist on the truth of the Confession of Belhar: “that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world”. So we shall have to shape ways of resistance, beginning from our own understanding of the Christian faith and its calling for the times in which we live. And finally, we shall have to find new ways of obedience, of being in solidarity, and of creating communities of life and witness in the world.

These are the most appropriate ways of discerning the signs of the times and of acting upon that discernment.

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Prosperity for the few is built on the back of insecurity for the many.
CHAPTER 4

Power and insecurity:
The Politics of Globalisation and its Consequences

INSECURITY

In the last chapter of this report the reader will find reference to what we call “prophetic storytelling”, a means through which we make use of stories to articulate the truth about situations and people, their pain, suffering and hope and to speak that truth to those in power. This chapter is a excellent example of this. As a case study of a specific situation in South Africa, we expose the global realities behind local tragedies and tell the story not just for the analysis it offers, but also for the call it makes on us to act with compassion and justice.

1. Insecurity is the abiding consequence of the current historical era: by exploiting the relative weakness of countries, rules are forced upon nations which remove whatever state protection exists for industry and workers, replacing such protection with a condition of vulnerability. This is justified through the ideological projection of neoliberal globalisation, which in this report we call globalism, as unavoidable and inevitable, something akin to an irresistible force of history. In fact, globalism is the result of political and policy decisions made by powerful elites to advance and defend their interests. Globalism is not a benign and neutral process but – for the time being at least – ideologically driven in the service of the rich and powerful, globally. The reason for this is the ideology of neoliberalism which, in the name of “competition” and “efficiency”, pursues a world in which the “market” reigns supreme over society.

2. Thus the continuing impoverishment of Africa becomes illuminated as a consequence of processes begun by particular political decisions. These decisions are put into effect by international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation and the Bretton Woods Institutions in which the odds are stacked against Africa and the rest of the South. Because of the power imbalances in these institutions, rules are made which disadvantage poor and weak nations. Thus, international agreements are entered into with predictably unequal outcomes.

3. Regarding the position of citizens in this paradigm, neoliberal proponents do not regard unemployment as a social problem but as a beneficial condition for profit-making. Therefore, prosperity for the few is built on the back of insecurity for the many. This plays itself out at the global and the local level.

4. One of the stated aims of neoliberal policies of economic openness and trade liberalisation is poverty reduction through growth. Despite these policy aims, trade liberalisation may detrimentally impact on income distribution through exposing formerly protected sectors and companies to international competition which can cause losses in income and employment. The case of the clothing industry in South Africa provides an illustration of such an outcome, as the liberalisation of trade in South Africa precipitated the decline of the clothing industry and resultant employment loss. While other economic factors also contributed to its deterioration, the government has acknowledged that global exposure has placed the industry in a “difficult period”, necessitating restructuring. Restructuring has involved the contraction of the formal sector of the industry, the shedding of jobs and the informalisation of the industry.

5. From the 1980s onwards the South African clothing sector has increasingly been exposed to international competition, a process which was significantly accelerated when South Africa acceded to the World Trade Organisation’s (WTO) Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) in 1994. Taking a step back, this was made possible by the shift to neoliberalism in South Africa while the apartheid-era National Party (NP) was still in power. This shift was confirmed in post-apartheid South Africa with the African National Congress (ANC) government’s adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme in 1996. Disturbingly, GEAR showed remarkable similarities with the NP’s Normative Economic Model, released in March 1993. These include: the emphasis on combating inflation and reducing state expenditure; improved international competitiveness and industrial reorientation towards export markets; tax reductions; boosting small business; relaxing exchange controls and containing wage increases. From the post-apartheid South African government’s vantage point, economic and political imperatives necessitated economic policy that would promote international openness, partly to deal with profitability and productivity problems in the manufacturing sector, as reflected in trade and balance of payment problems. Clothing and textiles tariffs were dismantled at a faster rate and over a shorter period than required by the ATC. This translated into the industry being ill prepared for the resultant swift rise in clothing imports, with the bulk emanating from China. The South African clothing industry has been unable to compete with China in the primary clothing markets of the EU and US after the ATC brought the Multi-Fibre Arrangement to an end on 1 January 2005.

LIBERALISATION

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UNEMPLOYMENT

6. The predominantly female workers have had fewer options to adjust to the changes, with the consequences of restructuring
STUDIES...HAVE SHOWN WOMEN TO BE ESSENTIAL FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF LIVELIHOODS IN POOR FAMILIES GIVEN THAT THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO SPEND THEIR INCOME ON THE NEEDS OF OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS AND CHILDREN IN PARTICULAR.

has been associated with growing unemployment, and re-employment levels in the clothing industry have been low. The labour intensive nature of the clothing industry provides it with a social function to absorb relatively low-skilled labour which is otherwise currently not being absorbed in the South African economy.

7. When identifying those more exposed to trade-related shocks, vulnerability by livelihood group, socio-cultural identity and geographic location should be investigated. Clothing workers fall into the livelihood groups “urban industrial workers” and “rural industrial workers”, categories characterised by low entry barriers (e.g. skills), low wages and high levels of drudgery. Some 86% of the workers in the South African clothing industry are women, which fits the worldwide trend. Women are regarded as particularly “suitable” workers for the clothing industry because of patriarchal perceptions of their “capacity” for long periods of physical immobility, patience, dexterity, “docility”, desperate actions such as begging for food from neighbours, creating a snowball affect in which whole communities have to absorb the impact of job losses in the clothing sector. Studies have shown differential effects on family members according to gender, with women and children bearing the brunt of employment loss. Unequal power relations in the home ensure that the employed male partner’s standard of living is frequently not affected by the female partner’s job loss, as the consequences of the woman worker’s job loss are off-loaded onto her and her children.

8. Livelihood strategies for retrenched clothing workers are limited by the dearth of economic opportunities in communities which are already under stress and under-resourced. The limited employment opportunities in Mitchells Plain, for example, cause clothing workers to arrange employment for family members at the clothing factories where they are employed, with the result that a factory closure can cause a household to lose all its breadwinners in one fell swoop. Moreover, women’s employment loss can be devastating in poor communities as the effects are felt beyond the individual worker who loses her job. Studies in developing countries have shown women to be essential for the maintenance of livelihoods in poor families given that they are more likely to spend their income on the needs of other family members and children in particular. In South Africa, the lack of economic opportunities for the poor majority means that livelihood options are diminished to
areas. The rate of absenteeism in the clothing industry, which is notoriously high (7%), is ascribed to the social problems with which these women have to cope, including being the sole breadwinner, alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence, gang violence and women’s continuing role as the caregiver within the household. These pressures increase after retrenchment. A study published in 2003 found that retrenchment led to a “significant and sustained decline in household income, severely constraining the ability of households to maintain expenditure on healthcare, education and food”. In all, 68% of households reported the reduction of income spent on food as a coping mechanism since job loss, as budgets left little room for reallocation of other expenses. In 34% of households someone went without food because of lack of money; in 25% of households a child went without food because of lack of money. Some 76% of households reported being affected by the loss of health insurance. Loss of health insurance had a destructive multiplier effect, as the workers’ family members were frequently reliant on the workers’ sick fund for access to health care. Some 60% of interviewees were supported by another employed person in the household, and 27% were supported by people outside the household. While urban and rural workers frequently access the available social security support mechanism – the child support grant – social security as provided by government is inadequate to buffer the shock, leading to respondents in the study reporting reduced access to healthcare and a decrease in food consumption. Poor nutrition, health and education undermine families’ attempts to prevent a further slide into poverty. In another study more than half of the respondents were the sole breadwinners in their homes before retrenchment. Respondents reported children being denied access to education because the parent was unable to pay school fees. Confirming other findings, unemployed clothing workers were forced to make trade-offs between different needs, having to choose between purchasing food, paying for transport to look for a job, or pay-as-you-go electricity. Respondents frequently found themselves in a spiral of debt, as they borrow money to cover basic needs. Another coping strategy is the pooling of resources, as retrenched workers move in with employed family members, or send their children to live with employed family members. These strategies illuminate the pressure that families are placed under, and the resultant social fragmentation.

INFORMALISATION

10. Finally, opportunities for re-employment are frequently limited to small home-based clothing sweatshops called “cut, make and trims” (CMTs), with the concomitant problems of non-payment, underpayment, inconsistent payment, lack of social insurance, long hours and unhealthy working conditions. Retrenched women clothing workers cannot find work in the regulated, formal economy and are therefore forced to work in the unprotected conditions of the CMTs. The primary characteristic of the CMT is its invisibility to regulators, as these operations are situated in households or on residential premises and are of a short-lived, up-and-go nature. Therefore non-compliance with BC (Bargaining Council) agreements and non-registration with the BC are rife. Some 877 CMTs employing 24 000 workers were by the mid-2000s to have writs of execution issued against them for failing to comply with BC agreements, including registration and conditions of employment. Apart from illegal arbitrary variations in wages (from as little as R50 per week to R450 per week in both the non-metropolitan and metropolitan areas in 2005), CMT employers under-register the number of workers in their employ to reduce levy costs. Some 700 small operators were to be prosecuted for not paying the minimum wage as agreed in the clothing BC. In KwaZulu-Natal alone, the CMT Employers’ Organisation had 162 members who employ a total of 8 500 workers, but estimated the number of CMTs in the province as at least 500 in the mid-2000s, representing another 17 000 workers. Therefore, at least 438 CMTs in KwaZulu-Natal were not registered with the National Bargaining Council, the reason being avoidance of the levies associated with registration. These levies include provident fund and health care levies. A registered business also has to pay UIF (unemployment insurance) for each worker, the SETA (the Sector Training Authority) levy, and allow workers paid leave; paid public holidays; and 10 days paid sick leave. According to CMT employers, they cannot afford these costs because payment for production is too low in the context of price suppression. In sum, the invisibility of CMT workers ensures they have little bargaining power, causing these workers to be subjected to unhealthy working conditions, including long hours; inconsistent or no payment for work rendered; and no social insurance. CMT workers absorb the costs of the seasonality of clothing production, earning less money or even no money in cases where workers fall prey to fly-by-night operations. In survivalist operations the conditions are the worst, as unemployed family members render unpaid work to “help out” and children in the household are drawn in to supply labour. Working conditions are unhealthy and unsafe, with inadequate ventilation and unsafe electricity supply and machines. Therefore, the social costs of restructuring are not only absorbed by the women who used to work in the industry and who, because of the adjustments, cannot find employment but also by their families.
EXPORTS THE ANSWER?

11. The question that arises in the context of a study on trade and poverty is whether export production, a solution proffered by advocates of neoliberal capitalism, could boost employment creation. The South African clothing industry is comparatively unusual, as it supplies both the domestic and foreign markets. Market share has been lost to imports, as the latter went up from 7% of domestic consumption in 1995 to 20% in 2002. Re-orientation towards export production has been strongly espoused, and backed up by government support, but only companies able to attain economies of scale or to access niche markets have been successful. Exports in rand value doubled between 1995 and 2000 and increased by another 50% by 2003 only to suffer a setback with the appreciation of the currency. In 2004, exports fell back to below 2002 levels. A number of clothing manufacturers had been exporting apparel to the US and EU markets for a substantial period of time, some having started during the apartheid years. The numbers have been disappointing, however, with about 150 exporters out of a total of 2000 clothing manufacturers registered with SETA. The potential for export growth was arrested with the appreciation of the rand, resonating with the assertion that greater openness may be associated with greater volatility and economic shocks, for example, through capital surges or shifts in the terms of trade. Vulnerability to such volatility is especially true for developing states pursuing policies of economic openness, as the financial crises of the past decade in Latin America and South East Asia have illustrated.

In South Africa, the currency’s movements have greatly affected the ability of manufacturers to export competitively, which has translated into job losses. It has also meant that the potential for export manufacturing to create jobs has not been realised, meaning that workers that have lost their jobs have not been re-absorbed. Therefore volatility has the most impact on the vulnerable and the poor. Established companies which are large job providers have experienced setbacks because of the South African rand’s appreciation in the mid-2000s. The largest clothing manufacturer in Southern Africa, Seardel, reported that its clothing exports dropped by 53,5% from 2003 to 2004 as a result of the stronger rand, accounting for 9,2% of total revenue in 2004 as opposed to 19,9% in 2003. Its woes continued as its headline earnings per share decreased by 30% between 2004 and 2005. Examples of mass production manufacturers who closed down because of the turn in the rand are (1) several large KwaZulu-Natal CMTs (with around 300 workers each) which exported jeans to the US until the rand turned; (2) a foreign investor withdrawing in the wake of the rand’s appreciation after setting up a large factory in Atlantis near Cape Town to produce jeans for export. Only a “small percentage” remains of those exporters who in 2001-2003 had been exporting on the back of the then weaker rand.

12. Moreover, the preferential access to the US market afforded by the United States’ Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) did not compensate for the currency’s strength. South African exports have fallen substantially since 2003, while exports from other AGOA signatories have continuously been rising. While the year-to-date figures for 2004 and 2005 are lower for AGOA exports overall – possibly reflecting the end of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement – South Africa’s figure for 2005 is almost 50% less than that for 2004. While the currency is not the only factor in the decline of exports under AGOA, it shows that a setback such as a stronger currency in conjunction with another factor, such as poor textile supply, can cancel the viability of exporting. The AGOA triple-transformation rule – not only fabric but also yarn should be sourced from either the US or signatory states – has prejudiced South Africa and Mauritius which do not enjoy lesser developed status under AGOA such as Kenya.

THE FUNCTIONALITY OF INSECURITY

13. The case study of the clothing industry reveals the functionality of insecurity in the neoliberal system. The decentralisation of production is spurred on by the search for lower labour costs. Labour costs are lower in some countries because of the lack of democratic and human rights and therefore workers’ rights in those countries. Therefore, decentralisation of production is enabled by the existence of vulnerable workers, especially in the South. In this process, the position of workers in the North is fundamentally weakened because they are brought into direct competition with workers in undemocratic states or states with limited or no human rights regimes. In this way, the carefully constructed social security of people built after the Second World War in developed countries is also being demolished. By increasing the pool of vulnerable workers inside countries and globally, the positions of employed people are also weakened. The attack against working people is furthermore done in very real ways such as the proliferation of insecure types of employment, such as contract, casual, temporary work and the outsourcing to informal operations. Indeed, we have seen massive informalisation of work with factories closing and unregulated operations springing up outside of the reach of governing authorities and trade unions. This makes workers even more vulnerable and unable to bargain a living wage and a decent work. Therefore the system preys on vulnerability. Profit is generated from insecurity. Consequently, the overturning of the post Second World War balance of power between government, capital and labour is being further entrenched in favour of capital.
BY INCREASING THE POOL OF VULNERABLE WORKERS...

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REGULATION AND DEMOCRATIC
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DISASTROUS RESULTS
1. Since September 2008, the world is experiencing the deepest and heaviest international financial and economic crisis since the Great Depression of 1929. What had started as a crisis of the sub prime real estate sector in the US, turned into a credit crunch and a banking crisis for the world. In the US, the epicentre of the crash, the whole business model of “investment banking” has collapsed. The US and the EU have released rescue packages in the order of altogether $2.5 trillion. Major banks and insurance companies have been nationalised in order to prevent a collapse of the entire financial system.

2. In the meantime, the spillover of the crisis to the real economy is fully under way. The IMF predicts a recession for the developed countries in the next few years. The US and several European economies have already started shrinking, and the worst is still to come. The contraction of economic activity will increase unemployment and inequality; new pressure will be put on wage-earners to accept lower wages and weaker social protection; poverty will increase.

3. Also, the decoupling theory, i.e., the idea that emerging markets and developing countries would not be or only slightly affected by this crisis, has proven to be an error. Pakistan and the Ukraine are practically bankrupt and were saved only by huge rescue packages from the IMF and the EU. Argentina too is at the brink of bankruptcy. Brazil, Russia and the Asian emerging markets have suffered dramatic downturns in their stock exchange markets and heavy depreciations of their currencies. South Africa is already in recession. Only China and India seem to be quite resilient, although there is a temporary decline in growth rates also.

4. The highly vulnerable economies of the least developed countries will be hit particularly hard by the crisis. Demand from developed countries will shrink, and as a consequence, so will the exports from developing countries. Investments will also decrease. The balance of payments of those developing countries which have no, or small, currency reserves, will deteriorate – with the risk of incurring new debt. Like always, in such cases, the most vulnerable groups in society will be hit the hardest. Poverty reduction programmes will suffer setbacks. Those, who believed until now, that the Millennium Goals for Development could still be reached, can definitively give up any hope.

THE BANKRUPTCY OF THE FREE MARKET PARADIGM

5. The crash also reflects the bankruptcy of the dominant economic paradigm. The concept of self regulating markets, the idea that liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation would lead to the best of all worlds, has shown itself as pure ideology. The crisis shows that markets left alone without political regulation and democratic accountability lead to disastrous results.

GLOBALISATION CENTRED ON FINANCIAL MARKETS: A HISTORIC TRANSFORMATION

6. In 1973, when the Bretton Woods institutions were at an end, a radical change of historic proportions started in the world economy. Fixed exchange rates were being replaced by free floating ones, which means fluctuating rates due to supply and demand on foreign currency markets. Capital controls were largely abolished and replaced by liberalisation and deregulation of the capital flows. Capital became the most mobile of all factors of production. This gave money more value than any other factors of production, and this advantage capital now makes full use of. The relation between the real economy and the financial system was inverted, which led to the economic dominance of the financial markets over the rest of the economy.

EMERGENCE OF NEW AND HIGHLY LUCRATIVE SOURCES OF YIELD

7. With the emergence of transnational financial markets, completely new and extremely high sources of yield have been found. This leads to entities having liquid capital at their disposal, placing it preferably into the new financial markets businesses, as earnings here are normally markedly higher than in trade and production. This leads to a structural weakness of investments with corresponding negative consequences for growth and employment.

8. The subordinate status of the financial market compared to real economy, has been replaced by the new system. By unfettering the financial markets, they became not only independent, but even a superior source of accumulation. A new economic system, centred on the financial markets, has emerged, which has replaced the "Rhenish Capitalism" (Social-democratic capitalism) with social partnership, full employment and a certain measure of welfare for the economically weaker layers of society. Some call this system asset and wealth-driven accumulation, others talk of financialisation; the former German chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, uses the metaphor of predatory capitalism; while others speak of financial capitalism.
NEW ACTORS – THE INSTITUTIONAL INVESTORS

9. The dynamic of the financial markets has brought up new actors. As a result, the institutional investors such as banks, pension funds, insurance companies, investment funds, etc. are of central importance.

10. The latest institutional innovations are embodied in Hedge Funds, Private Equity Funds (PEFs) and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS). While banks, insurances and pension funds still operate in their traditional business pattern and thus provide a useful service for their national economies, Hedge Funds, PEFs and REITS only concentrate on increasing shareholders’ fortunes. So the value for national economies produced by this side of the economy is only to increase value itself rather than all other sectors of the economy. So it is no longer sufficient just to make a proper profit, rather the concern is the highest possible yield. The contemporary international competition helps to push this procedure globally.

11. The planned high yield can only be realized by strategies of lowering costs, such as wage cuts, reduction of social security benefits, extension of working hours without wage adjustment and proper compensation and reduction of, or withdrawal from, sharing of costs on social security systems – these are all part of this mechanism of high yield. Other corporate aims like growth, improvement of competitiveness by innovation, and increase in production are all pushed to the back burner. Competition from these high yield institutional investments even forces enterprises not being controlled by institutional investors to similar strategies for lowering costs. The management’s behaviour is simultaneously being switched to the new type of accumulation by corresponding triggers, e.g. paying off a main part of the salary as option paper, high compensations, etc.

POLITICAL SAFEGUARDING OF TRANSFORMATION

12. Not only is the private sector a part of the radical change, but even political and governmental structures promote this transformation. On the governmental-institutional level, the important components are offshore-centres (OFCs) and tax paradises. These are territories where the usual economic, financial and tax legislation does not or only partly prevail. The OFCs are not marginal. The liquid resources being invested there are estimated at $2.7 trillion (2004) which is about 20% of the capital in bank accounts worldwide. The OFCs serve the financial markets’ operators to escape financial supervision, to avoid taxes more or less legally and to enable money laundering for criminal and dubious purposes. By taking away taxable income from national economies, and by promoting capital outflow of the elites, the OFCs are extremely harmful especially vis-à-vis development politics. In addition, risks for the stability of the whole system can arise from them.

13. Another component is the multilateral financial situation. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the European Central Bank especially play leading roles in enforcing liberalization and deregulation in the financial sector. Structural adjustment conditionalities placed upon developing countries has also opened the door to enforce the economic orientation towards these financial markets.

14. On the national level, most governments aim towards a politics which meets the interests of the operators of financial markets. The combination of the hegemony of the neo-liberal discourse, lobbyism of the financial industry, practical constraints arising from the economy’s transnationalization and international competition has led to governmental policies which are extremely favourable for financial markets.

EFFECTS

15. The effects of these economic makeovers in the financial markets on developing countries can be found mainly in three areas: Risks of stability, social polarization and erosion of democracy.

RISKS OF STABILITY

16. At the end of the Bretton Woods system, volatility and systematic instability have increased dramatically, as financial crises and crashes. Substantial elements of instability are exchange rate volatility, short-time orientation, high-risk funds, offshore centres, derivatives, pro-cyclical behaviour (“herd instinct”) of financial market operators and the international risk of contagion with crises. Especially the vulnerable national economies of developing countries and Newly Industrializing Countries are affected by these changes as the crisis in the financial sector spreads to the real economy.

17. Even when there is no crisis coming up and the financial markets are functioning as they should, volatility and pace in the markets mean permanent economic stress and expenses for developing countries. Exchange rate instability leads to instability of their foreign trade proceeds and their debt servicing. This leads to an unstable and unpredictable economic environment.

SOCIAL POLARIZATION

18. Concerning distribution, the new system leads to social polarization, which means that development of income and asset formation are extraordinarily dynamic at the higher
WE NEED A FINANCIAL SYSTEM WHICH SERVES THE REAL ECONOMY
and top levels, while they are decreasing at the lower levels ending in stagnation or retreat. This process is equally valid for industrialized countries as it is for developing countries.

19. The effects of redistribution from bottom to top not only arise from the direct income, but also tax-politics usually contributes to social polarization. To increase a country’s competitiveness, financial investors are attracted with tax reductions. Financial markets use their political influence to lower direct taxes (income tax, corporate tax and wealth tax) and to increase indirect taxes (e.g. consumption tax). This leads to tax regression, meaning that the relative tax-charging upon the lower classes increases which leads to the erosion of tax justice.

20. The dynamics in the financial markets has an adverse effect on the social security systems and distribution patterns. Liberalization and deregulation in this sector lead to insurances and pension funds of the industrialized countries pushing into Newly Industrializing Countries and developing countries to sell health and old-age insurances to the middle classes in those developed countries. By doing so, they take away the foundations of the set-up of social securing systems which was based on solidarity between the emerging markets and developing countries. This actually also leads to the break-up of support solidarity systems inside the developing country itself.

Erosion of democracy

21. Money is not only an economic element. Disposal of large sums is a powerful means for gaining political influence and influencing politics. The main problem here is that together with the globalisation of the economy transnational areas are emerging which evade regulatory access to single nations.

22. But there is no democracy beyond the nation state. Especially the financial markets and transnational enterprises, whose decisions affect the fate of millions of people and influence nation state governments lead to the erosion of democracy. Decisions on investments by capital market instruments globally based on multi-national competition are enforced by governments in the local context; thus government policies have now become hostage to international financial markets.

Parallel to this, this social polarization and impoverishment within nations contribute to political destabilization because they engender xenophobia, racism and religious fanaticism.

ALTERNATIVES: STABILITY, SOLIDARITY AND DEMOCRATIC CONTROL BEFORE PROFITS

23. To create situations of stability, solidarity and democratic control, emancipatory reforms are necessary. The whole system of global finances in its neo-liberal form has proven to be economically unstable and inefficient as well as harmful to equality, general welfare and democracy. Therefore, systemic changes are necessary, and these are:

- It is decisive that financial markets be subjected again to political democratic control. Financial markets have to be there for people, not the other way round. They especially have to serve development and fight against poverty.
- In economic and financial decision-making, priority has to be given to sustainable development and to the human rights of all three generations.
- An appropriate institutional setting under the auspices of the UN has to be set up to regulate strictly and re-orient the financial system.

THE WHOLE SYSTEM OF GLOBAL FINANCES IN ITS NEO-LIBERAL FORM HAS PROVEN TO BE ECONOMICALLY UNSTABLE AND INEFFICIENT AS WELL AS HARMFUL TO EQUALITY, GENERAL WELFARE AND DEMOCRACY.

- National supervision and international cooperation between regulatory and supervisory bodies have to be strengthened, made democratic and broadened with a mandate to serve social needs. The participation of trade unions, consumers and other stakeholders in regulation has to be assured. Rating has to become a part of public supervision with a mandate to also assess the impact on society (e.g. avoid financial products, loans and companies that destroy the environment).
- Limits must be placed on unrestricted free trade and free capital mobilty worldwide. New international agreements must put other goals – like financial stability, tax justice, social justice and sustainability – over the free flow of capital, goods and services. Social rights and historical victories of workers must not be endangered by these treaties; on the contrary, they should foster international solidarity instead of competition.
- The basic orientation for real change has to aim at breaking the dominance of financial markets over the real economy.

Some suitable instruments for that purpose are:

- Taxation of all kinds of financial transfers including currency transactions, in order to finish with speculation, to slow down the speed of financial markets and to end short termism. Financing fair and sustainable trade, production and consumption should be stimulated. This includes a tax on all capital transactions to discourage short-term speculative transactions across borders.
- National authorities should unilaterally impose an appropriate taxation on national stock exchange transactions in order to stop speculation and ensure a more progressive taxation.
- Prohibition of the creation of (worldwide) financial industry conglomerates which are too big to fail, or too interconnected to fail, and too complex to manage all potential risks.
- Progressive taxation of capital income. A main factor contributing to the swelling of financial markets is the concentration of wealth. Thus, in order to slow down and stabilize financial markets, substantial redistribution of income and wealth from the rich to the poor is required as well as reducing incentives for excessive profit making and tax evasion mechanisms.
- Privatisation of social systems and of important infrastructure has to be stopped and reversed where it has already taken place. The privatization of pension funds has to be revised as they have led to the creation of capital roaming the world for high profits and investing in company shares that are socially and environmentally irresponsible.

24. To mitigate the effects of the crisis on the real economy, emergency programmes to deal with its effects are urgently needed. However, these rescue packages must be linked to strict conditionality, excluding any moral hazard.
- The overall costs of liquidity injections, bail-outs and mitigating measures should primarily be paid by those who are responsible for the crisis and have amassed fortunes.
- Therefore a special crisis fund should be set up in each country. The fund should be fed by a once-off extra duty on all capital income above 50 000 Euro and a 1% extra tax on all corporate profits in the financial sector.
- A share of this fund should be used internationally for the assistance of those poor countries which suffer from the current economic crises and are hit by the food and commodity price fluctuation.
- In addition, substantial public investment should be undertaken into the social infrastructure, education, culture and environment as these sectors suffer from under-investment and will create employment and support sustainable development.

25. In light of the crisis, some cornerstones of the present finance system require special attention, such as:
- Procedures of securitization must be restricted to institutions under the strict control of governments. Risky procedures of securitization, as in Collateralized Debt Obligations whose purpose was the massive resale of sub prime loans, must be prohibited.
- Speculative financial products should be prohibited, especially in food and where they have a destabilizing effect.
- All new financial products need to be tested by supervisors for their impact on financial stability and on society before being allowed.
- all financial conglomerates covering retail and investment banking, securities trading and insurance need to be restructured or separated and supervision fully adapted to the remaining conglomerate structures.
- The high bonus system should be forbidden as it incites risky behaviour up to the top management, without any accountability.
- strengthening of the public, cooperative and not-for-profit banking sector
- the re-nationalised banks, and banks where the state has acquired shares as a consequence of bail-outs should be restructured to service the needs of society, including affordable credit for sustainable projects and enterprises, universal access to good basic financial services, etc.
- Hedge Funds, Private Equity Funds and all other highly speculative and highly leveraged institutions should be banned.
- Financial derivatives should only be traded at the stock exchange, standardized and authorized by a supervisory body. Trade Over The Counter (OTC) should be banned.
- The economic function of offshore banking centres and tax havens should be completely closed down.
- in order to encourage long-term investment in sustainable investment and impede harmful short term speculation, the power of short term oriented shareholders could be limited by coupling the share voting rights to a minimum period of share holding (5 - 10 years) and by the prohibition of stock options (which incite managers to only care for the share price). Instead the management fees should have a ceiling and should partly be coupled to an indicator of general welfare.

26. All in all these changes are far reaching and deep going, but necessary. Unless the financial casino is closed we will not be able to develop a new and sustainable economic paradigm. However, such a new paradigm is an imperative, because the financial and economic crisis happens at a historical conjuncture, where humanity is confronted with other global crises: global warming and the scarcity of resources, first among these is the oil crisis. As the whole world economy is highly dependent on oil and other carbons both the CO₂ emissions and the upcoming lack of energy require a basic turn toward a low-carbon economy. Time is running out. The financial crisis has already absorbed a lot of financial resources and problem solving capacities. It is blocking the solution of the other global problems. Therefore we need a financial system which serves the real economy, in particular the financing of human development and of a green economy.
The desire for what money can buy has functionally replaced faith in God.
“In danger of losing our soul”

Consumerism

DEBRECEN AND ACCRA: INJUSTICE, IDOLATRY OR HERESY?

1. At its 24th General Council held in Accra, Ghana, from 30 July to 13 August 2004, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches made a number of statements regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction:

Speaking from our Reformed tradition and having read the signs of the times, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians. We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalisation and therefore we confess before God and one another.

Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political, and military empire which subverts God’s sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God’s just rule.

Therefore we reject the culture of rampant consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the neoliberal global market system, or any other system, which claims there is no alternative.

We believe that any economy of the household of life, given to us by God’s covenant to sustain life, is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and well being of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. We believe that human beings are called to choose God over Mammon and that confessing our faith is an act of obedience.

Therefore we reject the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth that has already cost the lives of millions and destroyed much of God’s creation.

Therefore we reject any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people, does not care for all creation, and privatizes those gifts of God meant for all. We reject any teaching which justifies those who support, or fail to resist, such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

2. The language used in these statements indicates that more than economic injustices and ecological degradation are at stake. The document also speaks of “the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians”. It calls for a critique of ideology, especially the ideology of consumerism, and seeks to unmask various forms of idolatry. In sections 9 and 10 it observes that the current crisis is “directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalisation” and that, “[this] is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation. It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance, which amounts to idolatry.”

3. The Accra Confession is dependent upon the WARC gathering in Debrecen, Hungary in 1997 where it opted to declare what was called a processus confessionis, that is, a “process of recognition, education, confession and action regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction.”

4. A similar consultation on the impact of globalisation in Central and Eastern Europe was held in Budapest, June 2001 and organised by the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation in conjunction with the Conference of European Churches. The message of this consultation was “Serve God, not Mammon!” It raised the following challenging question: “Will the churches have the courage to engage with the ‘values’ of a profit-oriented way of life as a matter of faith, or will they withdraw into the ‘private’ sphere?” It suggested that “This is the question our churches must answer or lose their very soul.” It asked churches to help their members to rediscover the Christian virtues of self-restraint and asceticism and to “propagate these values in their societies as a way of countering individualism and consumerism, and as an alternative foundation for economic and social development”. This clearly indicates a shift from a prophetic critique of injustices to a prophetic critique of idolatry. This is a crucial development, because while the former is absolutely required we have not always fulfilled the vocation of critiquing idolatry. In the case of consumerism both these vocations were utilised.

GLOBALISATION AND CONSUMERISM

5. Can Christian critiques of consumerism perhaps help Reformed churches to take their discussions on the current global economic order in the context of globalisation forward?
Firstly, our distinction between globalisation and globalism has to be kept in mind. Likewise, the issue of human use etc. must be divided between consumption and consumerism. Secondly, we must recognise that there are many aspects, dimensions and theories on globalisation. The same applies to consumerism and consumer societies. These are however dependent on the discernment Acra speaks of in “reading the signs of the times”, and not to let the prophetic critique be blunted by entanglement in false dichotomies. Thirdly, consumerism and globalism are both criticised primarily for the ecological degradation and economic injustices.

6. In Christian literature the following six points of entry for a critique of consumerism are identifiable:

- “The consumer society is not sustainable”: According to this ecological critique, a continuously expanding economy is not sustainable on a finite planet in the long run.
- “Consumerism exacerbates injustices”: According to this economic critique, the pervasive influence of consumerism amongst the rich and the poor is tragic because it reinforces economic inequalities.
- “The affluent have become the victims of their own desires”: According to this sociological and psychological critique, consumerism has a severe impact on the health and lifestyles of the affluent themselves.
- “Consumerism undermines virtue and breeds vices”: According to this virtue ethics critique, consumerism stimulates the worst in human beings: greed, avarice, hoarding, envy, covetousness, pleasure-seeking, pride, etc. In response, the virtues of wisdom, simplicity, frugality and care are to be retrieved.
- “The consumer society encourages commercialised cultural and religious practices”: According to this critique, commercialisation leads to a shallow engagement with almost everything, including, for example, human sexuality, education and employment. Such commercialisation also has a pervasive influence on the ecclesial practises.
- “Consumerism amounts to idolatry”: According to this ideological and theological critique, consumerism challenges almost every single aspect of the Christian faith.

7. The last of these critiques is of special significance. The question is whether more than a prophetic critique of economic injustices and ecological degradation is required. What forms of idolatry may be found in the context of consumerism? Would calls for a processus confessionis be appropriate at this stage within the context of Reformed churches?

CONSUMERISM: A FORM OF IDOLATRY?

8. Consumerism is not only criticised in terms of its consequences for human beings and the environment. It is often described as “the ideology of our times”. The irony is that in the name of individualism, freedom and consumer choice a new totalitarian worldview has emerged as a pervasive and hegemonic ideology but indeed as a form of (civil) religion.

9. Indeed, the Market is seen as the most successful, most widespread and most globalised “religion” of all time, winning more converts more quickly than any previous belief system in human history.

10. The Christian critique of consumerism is that it amounts to a form of idolatry. Such idolatry may be expressed in many forms – as worshipping the body, pleasure, excitement, money and so forth. Of course, consumerism, hedonism and materialism are seldom explicitly articulated as a form of religious belief. However, as Luther suggested in his Larger Catechism, the object in which people put their faith is in fact their God. To rely on or trust an object other than God amounts to idolatry, to finding or creating for oneself a surrogate god. There is thus a replacement of the Christian faith in the triune God. Another way in which idolatry can be detected is in terms of that for which people are willing to make sacrifices.

11. The biblical notion of “Mammon” provides the basis for such a critique of consumerism. The contention here is that the desire for what money can buy has functionally replaced faith in God. Something that is of some worth is being treated as if it were of ultimate worth. One may identify various examples of this in the context of the global economy: 1) the way in which insatiable human needs are taken for granted; 2) the assumption that economic distortions can be rectified through the functioning of the all-pervasive Market; 3) the way in which economic growth is portrayed in salvific terms as a panacea for poverty, social ills and human happiness, albeit that it also requires certain sacrifices to ensure such growth of which the victims are always the poor; and 4) the reductionist tendency to view something’s value in terms of its commodity price. Such idols not only distort life and despoil the poor but eventually enslave those who put their trust in them.

12. This critique of idolatry is perhaps epitomised by the document The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion (1989) produced by Third World Christians from seven countries, namely South Africa, Namibia, South Korea, the Philippines, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. The document offers an extended critique of the legacy of imperialism, colonialism and racism, analyses the roots of the conflict between those who are economically powerful and the powerless, and issues a strong call for conversion to those Christians who side with money, power, privilege and pleasure. The statement on idolatry makes it clear:

... In our countries, the worship of money, power, privilege and pleasure has certainly replaced the worship of God. This form of idolatry has been organised into a system in which consumerist materialism has been enthroned
"I SHOP
THEREFORE
I AM"
as a god. Idolatry makes things, especially money and property, more important than people. It is anti-people.

Because the idol is anti-people, it demands absolute submission and blind obedience. The idols we read about in the Bible make their followers into slaves, prisoners or robots depriving them of freedom. Subservience to money dehumanises people. Profits are pursued at the expense of people. The graven image of the god of money is the security state that defends the system and demands absolute and blind obedience. In some countries, it is cruel and merciless; in others, it wears a deceptive mask. Those who disobey are punished brutally; those who obey are rewarded with material benefits and security. Idols rule by fear and intimidation or by trying to buy people, to bribe them and seduce them with money.

SYMPTOMS OF IDOLATRY

13. There are many symptoms of such idolatry in the consumer society. Consumption has thus become a crucial determinant of cultural identity: "I shop therefore I am." This creates a Faustian world where there are no limitations placed on desiring, where innumerable desires can all be satisfied – on the condition that one surrender one’s own soul. The insatiable demands of the affluent leads to the habit of moving sponge-like through life, sopping up one experience after another, soaking in rich food, marvellous media spectacles, exciting travel to ever more exotic destinations, thrilling risks, the ecstasy of speed, gambling on the stock exchange, sexual pleasure, and even religious ecstasy. However, the attempt to accumulate experiences correlates with an inability to assimilate such experiences since everything is done in a hurry, in order to “keep up”. Moreover, a repetition of an experience of pleasure soon fades away to a feeling of mild contentment and then to boredom. As a result, hedonism is an opiate to relieve boredom.

14. The consumer culture with its depletion of available resources, its production of waste and its quest for pleasure and happiness cannot hide an inner spiritual emptiness. However, there is also a danger that spirituality itself may be commodified. There is indeed a burgeoning market for resources on spirituality. In fact, the quest for spirituality itself may be viewed as symptomatic of the emphasis on experience in consumerist cultures. There is a hunger for religious experience but an aversion to any theological definition of such experience or the demand of such an experience on the ethical life. This may hinder rather than assist attempts to retrieve and embody authentic Christian practices.

THE CONSUMER CULTURE WITH ITS DEPLETION OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES, ITS PRODUCTION OF WASTE AND ITS QUEST FOR PLEASURE AND HAPPINESS CANNOT HIDE AN INNER SPIRITUAL EMPTINESS.

THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL AS HERESY?

15. On the basis of the preceding analysis one may conclude that there are multiple forms of idolatry at play not only in society but also in the midst of Christian communities in the context of globalised consumerism. The clearest and cruelest examples of such a theological justification of the culture of consumerism may be found in contexts where the prosperity gospel is being propagated through Christian preaching and teaching.

16. The prosperity gospel as a form of Christianity has spread from the United States of America and elsewhere in industrialised countries to the African continent, especially amongst new Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (PCCs). It is thriving in South Africa and it is likely that such a portrayal of the gospel in terms of success, prosperity and wealth will become increasingly influential in the South African context, especially given the current role of paid television channels, tele-evangelism and the broadcasting of religious programmes derived from American sources and styles.

17. Like most other forms of heresy, the prosperity gospel flourishes on an element of truth, but also systematically distorts it. The element of truth at stake here is God’s blessings – including very concrete and material blessings such as enough rain on time, today and tomorrow’s bread on the table, protection on the roads, success with one’s studies, deliverance in times of crisis and abundant income. In certain contexts money can indeed be the way in which God blesses people.

18. Moreover, the prosperity gospel may easily be employed to legitimise a sense of “upward social mobility”. There are many people in South Africa who are entering the (lower) middle class for the first time. They realise that they themselves may not have received a good education, but that there are opportunities available for their children. If they can escape from of a culture of poverty, they can make it in life. They may soon be able to live in a suburban flat or house of
their own, buy a car and perhaps become part of the consumer class. Pastors in such areas typically support such a sense of upward social mobility. They emphasise the role of talents and opportunities for education and training and speak of grabbing such possibilities as being God’s will. Although the lifestyles of the consumer class is not sustainable for all on earth, this theological under-girding for a sense of upward social mobility is again quite understandable. It inspires church members within their local communities to aim higher, to believe in themselves and therefore to work harder so that they can reach the point where their full human potential is realised.

19. However, the prosperity gospel may also be used to encourage overt forms of affluence. In many cases the underlying assumption is that, if one gives one’s best for the Lord (and for the coffers of the local congregation), one will receive rich blessings from God. Thus such blessings then become signs of the authenticity of one’s faith (and of the pastor’s faith). There is something wrong with one’s faith if one does not receive such blessings. In such contexts the prosperity gospel becomes heretical.

20. The underlying problem related to the prosperity gospel is that it typically speaks about God’s blessings outside of the tension between the fall of God’s good creation and the redemption of that creation. The Christian gospel speaks about the redemption of creation from sin and evil and a calling forth of a new creation. The narrative of human culture, including the role played by money, buying and consuming within that narrative, is situated within this drama of God’s work on earth. This is not a drama of redemption from creation but of the redemption of creation. Christians therefore own and spend money, buy and consume within this tension – in the midst of the decay of a consumer culture, but also on the basis of the redemption in which Christians may already share, but which has not yet arrived fully.

CONCLUSION

21. On the basis of the preceding discussion, the following conclusions may be offered:

a) The Christian critique of the ideology of consumerism may help us to see the distinction between injustices (sin), idolatry and heresy more clearly. These may be found in theological writings and ecclesial resolutions, but it is perhaps more fruitful to explore the more implicit forms of heresy that may be detected in the form of perceptions, attitudes, habits, ways of thinking and talking and also in Christian teaching and preaching. In the case of such more implicit heresies it will be crucial to articulate deviant interpretations of the Christian gospel and the Christian faith as clearly as possible so that the dangers in this regard can become evident.

b) The clearest example of heresy in the context of globalisation (and the economic injustices and ecological destruction associated with that) is the propagation of the prosperity gospel. Since this is found most overtly amongst Neo-Pentecostal churches, it would be more appropriate for Reformed churches to focus on the propagation of tacit forms of the prosperity gospel in their own midst. The way to approach this is to investigate the far-reaching commercialising of churches, of the Christian faith and of the gospel itself within a consumer society – to address the needs of consumers of religious “products”. The danger here is that theological legitimation and ecclesial sanctification may be offered in this way with regard to the lifestyles, values and tacit assumptions of those Christians in the consumer class.

c) A Christian critique of consumerism should be a prophetic critique of economic injustices and ecological destruction associated with economic globalisation. Such a prophetic critique would typically address those in the positions of power in institutions that oversee the processes of globalisation. The critique of consumerism would also be addressed to ordained leaders and the laity within Christian churches. This is where a critique of globalisation will entail wielding a double-edged sword that touches upon the most basic assumptions of those Christians in the consumer class.

d) While recognising that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, it remains true that consumerism is driven by specific groups of people who draw both huge benefits from this consumer culture but who also generate the myth that everybody can partake of it, while we continue to see growing disparity among the rich and the poor and without any concern for the ability of our natural resources to carry such myths and such life-styles.
THE EARTH IS THE COMMON HOME OF ALL PEOPLE
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ECOLOGY AND JUSTICE

1. Ecology and justice are concepts that have not been traditionally held together. As long as humans regard themselves as outside of, and different from Nature – which is viewed as requiring human cultivation – every act of control and utilization of Nature is experienced as progress and the provision of additional security for the humans. The fact that interventions in ecological systems are frequently forcibly imposed on Nature and therefore can also have undesirable consequences, is often overlooked and ignored.

2. Even when we begin to understand that the permanent exploitation of the atmosphere results in global warming with adverse effects on Nature as well as the human, nothing has fundamentally changed in this regard. Instead, states are arguing about the degree of their respective responsibility, and consequently about their obligation to reduce emissions and commit themselves to taking responsibility to reduce emissions. The result is the continuation of the injustice inherent in climate change; which is largely caused by a small section of the world’s population who are radically limiting the life chances of the whole of humanity – be it already in the countries of the South today, or tomorrow also for subsequent generations in the North.

ECOLOGICAL INJUSTICE

3. The current enormous wealth of a small sector of the world’s population is accruing ecological costs mainly for the countries of the southern hemisphere, where the poor can hardly sustain the pace of adaptation or develop sufficient coping strategies. For this they are dependent on the assistance of the perpetrators who neither recognize their role nor take into account the dimensions of the changes. These have been called the “uncreators” – those who through greed and exploitative carelessness undo the good of God’s creation by turning it into chaos – who gained wealth as a result of exploitation of humans and nature, who do not treat nature as part of collective responsibility and our collective right. Yet they do have the political agency and status in the world to challenge it.

4. The justice gap is widened further in that the energy-poor countries are held back in their attempts to align their energy consumption with that of the industrialised nations. As it stands, a relatively small part of humanity over-utilizes the common atmosphere to such an extent that the greenhouse gas (CO₂) emissions already far exceed the amount the ecosystem Earth can bear. So even for the sake of overall justice for the nations in the South our ecosystem simply does not have the capacity in terms of any increase in carbon emissions.

5. The only way which promises justice and sustainability is therefore that of drastically reducing the greenhouse gas emissions of the countries that are overtaxing the atmosphere. This implies that the issue of justice must be resolved in a corresponding way also in those countries where – as in the countries in transition – such a differential exists between different classes of the population. If one assumes that in order to attain the recognized goal of not letting the average temperature rise by more than 2% compared with the pre-industrial age, greenhouse gas reduction in Europe must be in the order of 80-90%, then it becomes clear that such a goal cannot merely be attained through more efficient use of energy, the expansion of low carbon, renewable energy, and new technology. What is needed is an increase in access to sufficiency through a turn-around in lifestyle. While the industrial nations must aim for an economy capable of managing growth without devouring resources, in the countries of the south poverty-reduction is not attainable without economic growth. This challenge cannot be met without the transfer of know-how, but it must be a growth that is free of the negative consequences for the ecology and the climate consequences associated with it.

SOME PROBLEMS REGARDING ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

6. Already even the existing climate change has dimensions that affect the right to the physical integrity of billions of people. Inversely this means that the over-utilization of the atmosphere must be viewed as the collective violation of a human right. A human right to protection against the effects of climate change, however, is in immediate competition with another basic right, and so, almost without exception, the worldwide fight against poverty continues to follow the steps which led to the development of the industrialised nations.

7. This is closely linked to the intensive use of fossil energy of which the actual costs are not immediately accounted for. Since the beginning of industrialisation, the subsequent costs of the continually-escalating consumption of raw materials – it is now becoming apparent – have only been shifted elsewhere or put off for the future. At the same time it is undisputed that poverty reduction and climate protection cannot be alternatives, and that an ongoing fight against poverty is not attainable without climate protection.
Therefore climate protection is a decisive aspect of the fight against poverty.

8. In terms of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Rio 1992, humanity shares “common but differentiated responsibilities” for climate protection. Justice with respect to greenhouse gases does not let any party escape responsibility; it must however take into account where the cause of global warming is to be found and who possesses the technological, political and economic capacity to contain it. But everybody is also equally responsible for the non-achievement of viable results in the Copenhagen summit.

IF BOTH THE ECOLOGICAL NECESSITY AND THE CAUSE OF JUSTICE ARE TO BE SATISFIED, THE REDUCTION OF EMISSIONS TO A FRACTION OF THE CURRENT VALUES BECOMES OBLIGATORY.

Consequently, there can also be no consensus on how to create a balance between the fight against poverty and the protection of nature and natural recourses.

Here the danger of false alternatives poses a threat: while climate protection measures only show their effect indirectly and in the long term, traditional methods, by contrast, show results more readily and provide immediate relief in the fight against poverty by addressing the lack of energy with familiar technology. In addition, as developing countries point out – not without justification – they are not the cause of the climate change and their per capita greenhouse gas emissions will for the foreseeable future not even come close to those of the industrialised nations. They can therefore not be expected to make a comparable contribution to relieving pressure on the atmosphere, particularly as poverty has been conditioned by the undoubtedly largely ineffective energy utilisation and the overexploitation of resources with all the catastrophic ecological consequences that accompany this. A truly vicious circle!

9. Conversely, the position of industrialized nations, not without reason, is that the long term effects of the massive utilization of fossil fuels in the Industrial Period were not known at the time, and that a repetition, even within the context of the fight against poverty, cannot be afforded as this would inevitably lead to ecological collapse. The underlying implication of this is that others are not to be accorded the right one has unquestioningly laid claim to for oneself and for a long time, and that hence one cannot overcome poverty in one’s own country. The need for self-restraint in the use of fossil fuels can however only be credibly conveyed to the countries of the South if firstly, the industrialized countries themselves act consistently in this regard, and secondly that they offer all possible help to enable developing nations to skip stages of development that were always bound to the massive utilization of fossil energy.

THE CRITERIA FOR ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

10. The earth is the common oikos (home) of all people. However, living together only works out if there is a basis for the concomitant responsibility and honesty in our dealings with one another. As far as responsibility goes, the industrial nations are challenged in the very first instance as those who have caused climate change, who have the potential at least to limit it, and who, through pulling their economic and political weight may be able to describe to the countries of the south what constitutes positive versus negative action. The countries of the South must therefore be accorded the right to development, a right which needs to be distinguished from the right to economic growth – one which the North claims for itself as inalienable. They must have a right to the provision of basic needs – one which will legitimize the increased use of fossil fuels and the consequent rise in greenhouse gas emissions – if this indeed serves the eradication of poverty. To be fair, the responsibility to compensate for this must be that of the countries whose emissions are high.

11. For an equitable distribution of emissions, criteria are required which are derived from what is ecologically necessary, and which at the same time represent realistic goals. The aim for greenhouse gas emissions lies where these two criteria intersect. As it is, the industrial nations exceed this value of 2% several times over. If both the ecological necessity and the cause of justice are to be satisfied, the reduction of emissions to a fraction of the current values becomes obligatory. Without compromises, without even concessions (which may be thought to be unjust), a worldwide right to equitable utilization of the atmosphere will not be achievable. To secure this, a basic consensus is required which aims to both distribute expectations as widely as possible and which simultaneously accords to the respective parties their load-bearing capacity.

12. With the aim of a gradually approaching equitable utilization of the atmosphere the concept of Contraction and Convergence (C&C) takes the current distribution of emissions as the point of departure towards a progressive reduction. During the transition, existing injustices are noted, without being condoned. The issue of justice is both the weakness and the strength of this concept: the concept already needs to be adapted because the situation has changed in the mean time, and is continually changing. Neither the effects of the climate change already underway nor the economic development of the countries with large populations and concomitant emissions, being in transition, are adequately taken into account. Furthermore, the C&C concept presupposes discussions of
principle, which considering the urgency, should have been conducted a long time ago. In addition, the time factor as a whole has not been adequately considered. The strength of this position is that it takes the argument of justice as its point of departure and therefore has an ethical basis which engages at a level wholly different from all economics.

13. Trade in emissions merely represents a pragmatic approach. If applied with consistency, it prevents the externalisation of costs. In so doing it seeks to create a stimulus for the reduction of emissions. Ethically, however, it is problematic. The creation of a market value for a common resource that should no longer be misused but rather finally protected, further promotes a purely economic view of the world. The advantage of this system is that what has a market value, the market is most likely to consider worth preserving. Trade in emissions is primarily a political instrument that may not be exposed to market forces, but can only be effective if controlled within an agreed-upon framework of conditions. Three basic rules seem inescapable:

- The cost of the avoidance of emissions must be lower than that of the certificates.
- The trade in emissions must not be allowed to take on the character of trade in indulgences for ecological sins.
- The sale of emissions by low-emission countries must be limited. The limitation protects the poor’s right to development, otherwise their energy poverty can mutate into capital for the ruling elite.

REGARDING TRADITIONAL AND NEW ANSWERS TO THE CHALLENGES CAUSED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

14. An egalitarian right to the use of the atmosphere that does justice to climate protection requires a low-carbon lifestyle. Such a lifestyle cannot be achieved through technological progress alone. Of critical importance is a culture change which does not enable or define the envisaged goal primarily in terms of economic growth. Although such a change also makes economic sense as it may keep the inevitable escalating costs of climate change within limits, traditional approaches continue to be favoured:

- **Nuclear power**: Aside from the incalculable risks involved, nuclear power is no alternative. In terms of CO₂, emissions it is not particularly favourable; and uranium as a source of energy will only be available for a limited time, while additional capacities worth mentioning are unsustainable.
- **Fuels from agriculturally grown raw materials**: If technologically produced on a major scale, their ecological and social cost is unjustifiable. Agricultural fuel is not suitable as an effective contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and it also increases the justice-gap between North and South.

- **Increased efficiency**: While this is an important technological aid to ensure that energy is no longer squandered, the point has to be clear that this does not constitute the panacea. Increased energy efficiency as a single initiative can by no means ensure a low-carbon lifestyle.

15. The drain on energy resources cannot be reduced to a justifiable level with technological solutions only. Of more critical importance is a behavioural change in the direction of a modest resource-thrifty lifestyle whose entire orientation is aimed at sufficiency.

THE IDEA OF SUFFICIENCY AND METANOIA IN THEOLOGY

16. The concept of sufficiency and the theological concept of metanoia are not identical. In the first summaries of the words of Jesus the word ‘metanoia’ occurs as a call to change one’s ways or as a call to repentance (Mt 4:17). Theologically metanoia is a response to the understanding of the liberation from sin brought about by Jesus Christ, or stated positively, the recognition of God as Lord of all life. Metanoia is therefore not a purely ethical concept; it is born of a gratitude for salvation that cannot be separated from ethical consequences. Metanoia happens when human beings respond to the insight into God’s existence and through their life, recognize that the existence of God has set limits.

Humankind will therefore – for the sake of God and humanity – strive to reverse transgressions, including the fact of having elevated themselves to a governing power and displacing the Creator over human beings and the environment. Metanoia is the continuous process of always seeking new answers to the repeatedly experienced recognition that humankind has taken over God’s place, and has even sought to justify this theologically. Gen 1:28 was used – without reference to the Creator and in denial of the obligation to the welfare of life and the limits this places on human intervention in Nature – to legitimate the shaping of the world according to one’s own ideas. If, according to biblical precepts, the human race was charged to participate in God’s creative work of transforming chaos into order and creating a habitable biosphere, anthropogenic climate change transforms this habitable space, cosmos, into chaos and destroys it.

17. The task today continues to be the preservation of the biospheres – with the exception that the “Lebensraum”, must
now be wrested not from Nature, but from humankind. Consequently, those calling for a change of ways are inextricably linked to those to whom the call is directed, albeit in differing measures. They are faced with the question of credibility, which in the first instance compels those in the churches of the North to both seek and to practise a compatible level of consumption and a lifestyle for all people that is capable of adapting in the short term to a use of resources in line with an egalitarian usage right. What is needed is to rediscover traditional Christian values like moderation and modesty, in ways that are neither individualistically narrow nor lived in a monastic renunciation. What is needed is exemplary leadership in the practice of a lifestyle which has become imperative if maintaining the habitability of planet Earth is to be taken seriously.

**ECCLESIAL CONSEQUENCES**

19. The churches of the North should not be exempted from the need to act promptly and radically. Even in terms of efficiency, comparatively there is a lot of catching up to do. Churches’ attitudes to resources are neither acceptable in terms of justice nor compatible with the commission of preserving or liberating creation.

20. Very different demands are made in terms of sufficiency. Congregations must overcome their energy-intensive way of living by organizing themselves differently and by scrutinizing their practices. Distances to church services, destinations for outings, church heating, financial investments and other factors and practices need to be re-evaluated.

In congregational life the issues that crop up are the same ones with which congregational members are also confronted in all other spheres of their lives. Churches therefore have the special opportunity of explaining the concept of metanoia and the associated concept of sufficiency as an appropriate lifestyle; they may follow their own tradition and develop a lifestyle not determined by consumerism. In doing so, the congregation will be well-prepared not only to change its own practice but also to stimulate public discourse on limits and self-restraint.

**IT IS NOW POSSIBLE, WITH THE PROPER FUNDING, TO REACH DEVELOPMENT GOALS WITH ALTERNATIVE, ECO-FRIENDLY METHODS RATHER THAN PERPETUATING THE ECO-DESTRUCTIVE METHODS OF THE PAST.**

The UN is making attempts in this regard, but with its current structures it cannot provide the uncontested and neutral organisation which the comity of nations needs.

This does not free nations of their responsibility for action at all levels, including adaptation of individual lifestyle in accordance with what the ecosystem Earth allows. Efficiency and sufficiency must complement each other in all spheres. This requires from countries of the North and the elites of the South that they scale themselves down significantly and at the same time, that they support others, e.g., through technology transfer. In the necessary development of under-developed countries, we must emphasize that it is now possible, with the proper funding, to reach development goals with alternative, eco-friendly methods rather than perpetuating the eco-destructive methods of the past.

In addition, it is imperative that the countries of the northern hemisphere in particular, must give the climate goals a measure of commitment and binding force which may not be relativized, even under circumstances of extreme crisis. This also entails that the dangerous extent of global warming may no longer be played down politically. It is a part of democratic culture that “uncomfortable truths” (Al Gore) be named, such as the truth that a certain lifestyle has become untenable.

**POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES**

18. In light of the extent of climate change brought about by human agency, the situation fundamentally demands a world political obligation. The task description for politics is clearly defined by the climate goal. It can only succeed through a global binding covenant. Since the necessary process cannot depend on the goodwill of the actors, an independent authority is needed, with the instruments to enable it to achieve the climate goal as a human right that is asserted against national egotism and particular interests of governments and/or the influence of their lobbyists.

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anyway; it can also have a liberating effect and provide a new quality of life for those who can provide themselves with everything by relieving them of such paralyzing consumer behaviour or from the pressure of having to continuously strive for more.

23. The question is what characterises theology as being capable of generating and sustaining political agency towards the common good? Christians – based upon their Scriptures – claim that life and community is normed by three fundamental moral principles.

- Human beings are to accept and trust the love of God
- Love God in return; and
- Love neighbour as God loves.

In short, "to love as God loves", is the moral core of Christian faith and faithfulness. Said differently, the mode of human agency is the biblical norm of "love". Thus, for all Christians, a theology capable of generating and nurturing political agency must include an adequate concept of neighbour-love, a notion of neighbour-love that is viable in a context of unsustainable earth-human relations and a brutally unjust global economy. In other words, Christians must accept love of the neighbour as the same love that extends to Nature which is reflected in our love for God.

Love as a political norm has two faces: compassion and justice. Love as a political-ecological norm has a third: Earth’s well-being. Theology, religious ethics and progressive activism on both sides of the North-South divide must claim that social justice is inseparable from ecological sustainability and the conviction that where Earth is damaged so too are people. This is our complete worship of God, and our complete commitment to human and ecological justice, as we work with God and pray for God’s Holy Spirit to come and renew the face of the earth. (Ps 104:30)
IN TIMES OF FOOD CRISIS
WOMEN
IN THE POOR COUNTRIES OF THE SOUTH CARRY THE HEAVIEST BURDENS

[Image of a woman working in a field]
CHAPTER 8

In search of life in abundance for all:
The Global Food Crisis

THE SITUATION

1. “We live in a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all.” (Accra Confession, 7) According to estimates of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the food crisis in the period from summer 2007 to summer 2008 raised the number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger up to approximately 900 million.

2. Cautious estimates assume that every year 3.5 million children die as a consequence of hunger and malnutrition. That is almost 10 000 children a day; thus in a little more than a minute seven children are sacrificed to the injustices of the global (dis)order.

3. In times of food crisis women in the poor countries of the South carry the heaviest burdens. In most underdeveloped countries, especially in Africa, the responsibility for ensuring food for the family lies on their shoulders. They grow the produce, process it, buy and sell it and they also prepare the meals for their family. Yet they are the ones who in the struggle against rising food prices are visibly disadvantaged compared to men. In Southern Africa women possess only 1% of the available agricultural land, in Brazil their share lies around 11%. Women are also disadvantaged in respect of access to credit, tools, training programmes and various other agricultural services.

4. Poverty means: less and poorer nourishment, hardly any money for health care, reduced capacity for work, less money for children’s education, less democratic participation. The vicious circle of poverty hardly leaves the next generation a chance to escape.

5. The crisis has even reached the poorest in the countries of the North. Churches and charitable organisations are setting up more and more agencies with names like “bread-basket” or “table” to feed the poorest of the poor.

6. In order to achieve the great Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the UN it is estimated that only $82 billion a year for a term of five years are required to realise these goals. Recognising that it is much more than just a matter of money, nonetheless when one realizes that the MDG’s – access to food and clean drinking water for all, adequate care for those affected by HIV, decisive steps against climate change – could be reached merely by a very small fraction of funds currently being made available to uphold the financial markets, then such injustice is truly incomprehensible.

CHIEF CAUSES OF THE FOOD CRISIS

7. The causes of the food crisis in the world can be found in the present as well as the past and, if we continue to do nothing to change this situation, will no doubt remain the causes for world hunger in the future. There is a general conviction that population growth influences the scarcity of food and thereby sharpens the problem of hunger. However, there is still enough food in the world to supply everyone with adequate healthy nourishment. It seems that the distribution of what is available, and further factors discussed below, are more responsible for food scarcity and hunger than simply the growing world population.

8. Agricultural policy as practiced for example by the EU and the USA makes a situation that is unfair competition with one-sided competitive advantages. More and more small farmers in the poor countries cannot hold out against the agricultural subsidies in the EU and the USA for their own farmers, the trade limits for goods from the developing countries and the forced liberalization of the markets in the developing countries. In many countries in the south cheap food imports have driven native agricultural and animal production from the market and driven farms into ruin. Thus the opening of markets in the south, enforced in the name of liberalization, has not infrequently driven people into misery.

9. Under the impact of constantly falling food prices, for the last forty years, many developing countries pursued a misconceived agricultural policy. Development of the land was generally neglected. If anything – mainly under pressure from agreements between national governments and multinational companies – it has become the building up of export goods and the modernization of a few larger agricultural centres. It is precisely the much needed small agricultural producers and functioning home agricultural markets supplying the native population with affordable food, that are now missing in many countries. This holds true for the South as well as the North.

10. In financial and personal respects, agricultural research concentrated one-sidedly on industrial production at the cost of further development of small farming methods in the lands of the South.

11. Climate change, for which the industrial nations are primarily responsible, is already now leading to losses in agricultural production and arable land. In the future it will have more drastic consequences. Even if different regions are differently affected, climate change will make the problem of hunger drastically more acute. Viewing globally one must say:
Those who have contributed least to global warming are the first and – because of the lack of financial means – the hardest hit victims of ongoing climate change.

12. The development of prices on the energy markets is of eminent significance for the development of global food security, especially in the poor countries. As long as the industrial and threshold nations continue to burn mainly fossil fuels, not only will global warming accelerate but in the middle and long term the price of crude oil will move to a distinctly higher level, because of the scarcity of resources. Rising energy prices causing rising production costs and these will be disastrous for developing countries and their populations. As the last Iraq war has shown, it is to be feared that the time has come when wars are fought over energy resources. Wars fought over the earth’s resources will lead, especially in the developing and threshold countries, to even more poverty, hunger and death.

13. FAO reports that the number of the hungry in the world is now over a billion. Reasons for this increase lie above all in the global crisis of the financial markets and its consequences. Investments necessary to increase agricultural productivity are not being made; capital is being withdrawn from poor countries; credit has become impossibly dear for small farmers; the prices for fertiliser and industrial materials remain very high in many countries.

14. Through the drastic expansion of cultivation of plants for fuel pushed above all by the USA and EU, more and more tracts of fruitful land are being used to grow plants for the production of bio-fuels. There is already a state of competition for the use of space between the cultivation of plants for food and plants for energy. The deforestation of the rain forest for the sake of gaining more space for the cultivation of plants for energy increases the climate change and robs small farming communities of their basis for existence.

15. A particularly scandalous factor in the driving up of prices for food, and one which is consequently responsible for the rising number of people being refused the elementary human right of nourishment, is food speculation. Under the pressure of the global crisis in the finance markets numerous investors, among them hedge funds and pensions, have diverted to speculation with raw materials, which includes foodstuffs. At the Commodities Market Exchange, the grain exchange in Chicago, the number of contracts between October 2007 and the end of March 2008 rose by 65% without any accompanying rise in real production. In this way speculation in foodstuffs drives the prices higher and thus shares responsibility for the increasing hunger in the world.

16. The eating habits of people around the planet are recognized to constitute a danger to our ecology. That has long since led to competition for the use of land between the cultivation of plants for food and the breeding of animals. Grain one can use directly for nourishment to produce meat with the same nourishment value as a kilogram of grain, demands between 6 and 12 kilograms of grain depending on the animal sort. Since an increasing consumption of meat and milk is to be observed in the threshold countries, we can assume there will be further scarcity and price increases for basic foodstuffs.

WARS FOUGHT OVER THE EARTH’S RESOURCES WILL LEAD, ESPECIALLY IN THE DEVELOPING AND THRESHOLD COUNTRIES, TO EVEN MORE POVERTY, HUNGER AND DEATH.

17. A further factor is the plundering of the earth’s fish resources. High-tech fishing by trawlers operating internationally is ravaging the rich fishing grounds of the African coasts, in many cases illegally. Native fishermen are losing their livelihood.

18. In some countries, for example the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Somalia, violent conflicts and civil wars, mostly entangled with global economic interests and those of political power are destroying the security of nourishment for the population.

ETHICAL POSITIONING

19. “We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness”, as the Accra Confession says. (Jn 10:10). Therefore we are guided by God’s love for the poor. In the discipleship of Jesus Christ we are in word and deed in solidarity with all people, particularly with those whose human rights are wounded.

We believe that human dignity is an inalienable gift of God. This dignity is best protected when human rights are practiced and defended. The right to nourishment, as central to human rights, is anchored in Art. 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in Art. 11 of the International Pact on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

20. On the basis of our faith in God, who wants “life in fullness” (Jn 10:10) for all people, it must be affirmed that the human right to nourishment is violated by the neglect of the development of small farming agriculture in the interest of large-scale producers and international agribusiness; by climate change; by the production of agrarian energy plants for fuel tanks of motor cars in competition with the cultivation of food for the stomachs of the hungry, and by food price speculation and price fixing.
CHALLENGES

21. The fundamental challenge from which all the following emerge is that human rights have precedence over the interests of economics and power. The securing of nourishment in developing countries may no longer be sacrificed to the liberalisation of the markets. Small farming agriculture must be protected and developed both in the South and the North. Quantitative import limitations of cheap offers may be necessary, for example surplus meat from the EU.

22. On the other hand, the process of removing trade restrictions protecting the EU against agricultural produce from developing countries must be continued. The redistribution of agricultural subsidies which has already begun in the EU must be continued. In addition ways must be sought of preventing food exports at dumping prices to developing countries as soon as possible.

23. The production of materials for bio-fuels may only be conducted on a scale which is demonstrably socially acceptable and sustainable.

24. Measures against climate change must have the highest priority on all levels. This is a challenge to politics and economics, but also to churches, congregations, families and individuals. Church congregations from the North and the South should each by themselves, and wherever possible, together through their partnerships, their organisations for development work and their ecumenical relationships support the political involvement of the poor and those whose rights are denied; advance the self-organisation of small farmers and land workers; serve the strengthening of women’s rights and support the access of the poor to credit both financially and personally.

With such an approach, the poor are no longer simply objects of sympathy and care but subjects with a right to justice, a right to be able to take their lives in their own hands in self-determination; subjects whose rights take priority over all interests of power and economics.
IN 13 COUNTRIES ON THE EARTH, 9 OF THEM IN AFRICA, PEOPLE HAVE TO MAKE DO ON AVERAGE WITH LESS THAN 10 LITRES A DAY
“The Lord makes it rain upon the earth”

Water – A Gift of God

BIBLICAL IMPULSES – WATER IS LIFE

1. “[For] God the Lord had not yet made it rain upon the earth.” (Gen 1:5). According to the so-called second creation account, that is the simple explanation for the fact that there was no life on earth. Only a damp mist makes life possible and the watering of the Garden of Eden by the river and its four streams secure this life. The so-called first creation account also leaves no room for doubt. What the biblical accounts of creation tell has long since become a universal insight: only water makes the emergence of life on earth possible.

2. “[For] God the Lord had not yet made it rain upon the earth.” With this something else, and very significant is said: God in Godself is the giver of water. Psalm 104 phrases it beautifully: “You let springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst.” (Ps 104:10ff). The water is not just there; rather “You” are the one who makes it spring forth.

In a region of great scarcity of water this absolute dependence on the gift of water was existential for the people of Israel. It is no accident that the Bible tells so many stories about waters and wells, of the blessing of rain and the perils of drought, of tortured longing for water and quenched thirst. This is recounted especially impressively in the record of the wandering through the desert, where God supplies God’s people in a wonderful way with the water needful for life. (Es 17; Num 20)

3. Water also has another side: water threatens life. The Bible speaks of that too, most impressively in the account of the great flood. Water is in a position to destroy life on the earth, and God the Creator undertakes the task of protecting the creation from this destructive power. It is God who promises: “Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood” (Gen 9:11). Especially Psalm 104 explicitly states that the Creator must preserve the earth from the floods of the waters: “You set a boundary which they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.” (Ps 104:9).

WATER CRISIS – THE PRESENT SITUATION

4. These experiences in biblical times – the lack of water on the one hand and the threat of water on the other hand – determines the life of many people on earth until today. Many are talking today about an increasingly sharpening water crisis.

5. We assume that significantly more than a billion people have no adequate access to clean drinking water. Both the adequacy of the supply and the supply of clean water pose a problem.

6. There is some 1.4 billion cubic kilometres of water on earth, but only a small part of the water is usable for humans. Most water is used in agriculture, followed by industry.

7. Water seems to many people to be inexhaustible. Over 70% of the earth is covered with water; there remains only a minimal proportion of perhaps 0.02% for humans to use. In addition the available water is very unequally distributed. Many areas of the earth have a water surplus, others acute scarcity of water. In 13 countries on the earth, 9 of them in Africa, people have to make do on average with less than 10 litres a day. The daily per capita consumption in Germany lies around 127 litres, and in the USA around 295 litres.

8. Added to this is the shortage of clean water. In many places this is the chief problem. Some people have no access to clean drinking water or they cannot avail themselves of this access because it is too dear for them. In both cases the result is that people consume drinking water out of sources which are highly polluted. But in many places even the official drinking water is heavily polluted, for example because the pipe network is corroded or because environmental poisons seep into the drinking water. This is further complicated by the fact that many people in the world have no sanitary facilities, about 2.4 billion. Of these more than a billion do not even have a rudimentary latrine at their disposal. All of this together place serious strains on clean water sources.

9. The aim of the Millennium Goals was to halve that part of the world population which had no access to clean water and basic sanitary facilities by 2015 (in comparison to 1990). As yet, however, it has not become apparent how this goal is to be realised. In fact, the number of those with access to clean drinking water and basic sanitary facilities has increased since 1990; admittedly, in the same period the world population has also grown by 1.5 billion people, so that the number without access to clean drinking water and basic sanitary facilities has hardly altered.

SOME CONSEQUENCES

10. Each year several million people die as a direct consequence of the lack of clean drinking water; countless people fall ill. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), every year approximately 1.8 million people die of diarrhoea mainly...
caused by polluted water; 90% of the dead are children under the age of five. To this must be added illnesses transmitted by animals which live or breed in water; of the 1.3 million people who die each year of malaria, 90% are children. Even if the precise numbers are difficult to verify, there is an evident connection between inadequate supplies of clean drinking water, deficient sanitary facilities and dramatic health consequences. The WHO estimates that 80% of all illnesses, and more than a third of all cases of death in the southern hemisphere, can be traced back to water related factors. Dr. Lee Jong-Wook, former director of the WHO said, “Water and sanitation is one of the primary drivers of public health. I often refer to it as ‘Health 101’, which means that once we can secure access to clean water and to adequate sanitation facilities for all people, irrespective of the difference in their living conditions, a huge battle against all kinds of diseases will be won.”

11. Apart from the health consequences there are other issues that need to be mentioned here. Above all, in those areas where there is shortage of water, women and girls often spend a significant part of the day collecting the necessary drinking water. This time is then lost for other urgently necessary tasks and lost for the children to visit school. That means that long journeys to a source of drinking water often lead to a dramatically poorer education, especially for girls.

12. Furthermore, a scarcity of drinking water often leads to conflicts, whether between individual persons, particular population groups or even states. These conflicts are already as old as humanity itself (cf., e.g., Gen 26:12-22). Many fear, however, that these struggles will increase to the point of armed conflict.

Internal social conflicts around water are increasing. In Kenya, for example, violent clashes between pastoral clans and settled farmers have occurred because of dramatic drought conditions. In 2009 several people have been killed in the resulting unrest.

THE CAUSES

13. The causes of the water crisis are multifarious and also vary regionally. We must limit ourselves here to some of the more global aspects.

14. A significant cause for the crisis is the increasingly unsustainable exploitation of the water reserves. This especially applies to agriculture, but also to the water supplies of many mega-cities as well as to industry. Modern technologies make it possible to pump out ground water substantially faster than it can regenerate. In parts of India the ground water levels have sunk dramatically because of the excessive use of ground water in agriculture, e.g., in cotton plantations.

15. Besides the real water consumption of households in individual countries there is the so-called “virtual” import and export of water which is of significance here. A study of the World Wide Fund of Nature (WWF) concludes that almost 2.2 billion cubic metres of water are used each year in India for the agricultural goods it exports to Germany. So the export of water-intensive products withdraws a huge amount of water from countries with already scare water resources.

16. Other causes of the water crisis are environmental destruction and climate change – extreme weather conditions increase exponentially. The frequent succession of extremely long-lasting periods of drought in many African countries is part of this climate change. Scientists predict that here as well as in many countries in Central and South America as well as in Australia the situation will further worsen, because of water shortage. This will have further impact on the ground water level which is already happening in many places. Wells that were often bored with the help of development agencies and were seen as a blessing to the people are running dry or require ever deeper boring to bring water to the surface.

17. A further aspect in this connexion is the pollution of water through industrialisation, agriculture and untreated domestic sewage. In a global perspective it is especially important to note that harmful substances are regularly exported and distributed, although their use has long been banned in the country of origin. The herbicide Atrazin mainly used in the production of maize is one such substance and is extremely harmful in flowing and underground water. Long forbidden in many European countries, it continues to be exported throughout the world and so infects long-term damage on lakes, rivers, canals and ground water in many places on this earth. Similarly the export of electronic scrap, for example, from the lands of the North to Africa or Asia not only disregards the health of the people who have to process it, but in addition the environment including its water resources suffers long-term contamination as a result.

18. Privatisation of water supplies has become a critical issue in the current discussion, and subsequently under massive pressure of the World bank, water supplies have been privatised in many countries. Ostensibly the reason given is that water supplies in public hands led to no improvement in the supply of clean drinking water for the population because of poor management and corruption. The big companies who exploited this situation came exclusively for the high returns.

19. However, many of the expectations associated with privatisation have not come to fruition while many of the fears have been confirmed. Soon it became clear that when people are living in poverty there are no great profits to be made out of the water supply. This led to the fact that prosperous living areas were attached to the water supply, but not those of the poor. The poor then had to buy their water from water
traders, who in turn drew their water from the supplies for the prosperous. Transport charges and the profit of the traders led to the fact that the poor in this case must pay substantially more for their water than those who can afford it.

20. Where the living areas of the poor are also connected to the water network, the companies discover that it is not easy to collect the price of water from the poor. As a result, water is turned off, or they even were ejected from their homes, as it happened in South Africa a thousand times. Another result is the installation of the so-called “water prepaid meters”, meaning that only those get water who have already paid for it; an impossibility for the poor to maintain.

21. In general, it must be concluded that water privatisation makes the situation for the poor worse. The poor must perforce consume polluted water, simply because they cannot afford clean water. In no way was privatisation able to prevent corruption which was the stated reason for privatisation – quite the contrary. Where supplying water becomes a lucrative business the risks of corruption are particularly high.

22. One particular aspect of privatisation is the sale of bottled water. In many places bottled water is the clean alternative to the public water supply, admittedly by comparison extremely expensive, so that here too only the prosperous can take advantage of it. The market for bottled water is estimated at $100 billion yearly. A few huge companies compete for supremacy. Yet very often the bottled water is pulled away from under the poor in the true sense of the word. The companies secure themselves the rights to draw off water, often at a bargain price or even with tax advantages. The drawing off leads in some places to the drying out of wells, pools and streams while the companies earn huge profits on water. Sometimes however, populations have succeeded through massive protests to stop the draining of their water, as was the case in Plachimada in India.

WATER, A GIFT OF GOD

23. “Water belongs to the earth”, says Maude Barlow in Ein Marshall Plan für das Wasser. Others say – out of their faith – that water is a gift of creation and therefore of the Creator. Water is thus a gift of God. In both perspectives water can never belong to individuals but can only be regarded as a common good of the creation.

24. This implies that water resources should be used with care and with regard to sustainability. For example countries with scarcity of water should not also export “virtual” water on a grand scale. Wherever possible, more water should not be drawn off than can be regenerated from the ground levels. Careful dealing with the water resources also involves avoiding its pollution, especially through poisons from agriculture and industry.

25. A significant step on the way is the declaration of access to clean water as a human right. In November 2002 the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Human Rights approved the “General Commentary No. 15” on the right to water. In March 2008 the Human Rights Council of the UN approved a resolution on the right to drinking water and sanitary facilities. These steps are to be welcomed and should be enforced.

26. Access to clean water poses the question of justice. In order to live and survive every person must receive a basic supply of clean water (30 - 50 litres a day) regardless of the means they have to pay for it. Since the gaining, processing
Women comprise the largest portion of the most vulnerable and the world’s poor.
1. While it has been assumed that globalisation would lead to growth and development, developing nations have experienced negative and, at times, devastating consequences because of the policy prescriptions of liberalisation and deregulation, enforced by international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation. Given that the vast majority of women in the world still do not have equal access to resources and life opportunities, globalisation’s negative consequences have affected women disproportionately. Consequently, the cause of gender justice, promulgated by the United Nations’ Beijing Platform for Action and Millennium Development Goals, as well as various national and regional agreements, has suffered. Women are further disadvantaged by exclusion from decision-making processes in the development of globalisation policies. Examples of harmful policies are those that allow subsidies to farmers in rich countries; that expose labour-intensive industries in developing countries to highly competitive multinational companies; and that block policy flexibility in non-industrial countries that are still attempting to industrialise; and that impose loan conditions that force poorer countries to cut spending. This often leaves these countries no choice but to cut spending on social services such as health and education. Often governments choose to cut on social while persisting in high levels of military expenditure, which is also to the detriment of women.

2. The United Nations (UN) publishes an international report on the progress of gender justice, or lack thereof. The most recent report is based on statistical information gathered in 2007, 2008, and 2009. Globalisation’s negative impacts are reflected in these statistics.

**EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING**

3. More than 1.2 billion people subsist on less than a dollar a day in the world. The feminisation of labour since the 1960s, combined with the informalisation of labour and the feminisation of poverty since the 1980s due to globalisation policies, mean that some 60% of the world’s working poor are women who are primarily employed in part-time, contract and other informal employment without job security, benefits or safety standards. Over the past decade, the service sector has overtaken agriculture as the main employer of women and, by 2007, about 36% of employed women worked in agriculture and 46% in services. Women in the South predominate in export industries such as textiles and electronics at 80% of the workforce, where they work under inhuman conditions to produce textiles, toys, electronics and sports goods for countries of the North.

4. The detrimental effects of globalisation for sub-Saharan Africa are severe. This region, the world’s poorest, where women provide 70% of the labour and produce 90% of the food, has suffered a decline of income by more than 2% over the past decade. Women still own less than 15% of property worldwide, and in developing countries that percentage drops to below 2%. Unsurprisingly, therefore, seven out of 10 of the world’s hungry are women and girls and 72% of the world’s 33 million refugees are women and children (UN Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM] Snapshot of Women Worldwide: Facts and Figures, March, 2009). The inequitable gender impact can also be seen in some countries where “the increase in child mortality during an economic downturn is five times higher for girls than for boys”.

**POLITICS AND OTHER POSITIONS OF POWER**

5. Women are woefully underrepresented in the world of national politics; as presiding officers in legal systems; and as company directors. The United Nations reported that in 2008, only 17.7% of all the legislators in parliaments around the world are women (Inter-Parliamentary Union Press). Only 17 heads of state worldwide are women.

**EDUCATION**

6. Externally imposed neoliberal policy prescriptions have involved the slashing of social spending, including spending on education everywhere especially in poor countries. This has been exacerbated by cultural prejudices and reduced incomes, substantially decreasing girls’ access to education, again with severe effects in poorer countries. In developing countries, one out of five girls enrolled in primary school does not complete primary education. The Women’s Learning Partnership estimates that worldwide, for every year beyond fourth grade a girl attends school, female wages rise 20%, child death rate drops 10%, and family size drops 20%. Girls in poor countries with low levels of female schooling are highly vulnerable to being forced to work rather than attend school as households sacrifice their life opportunities to cope with declining incomes.

**HEALTH**

7. As mentioned, neoliberal prescriptions to reduce social spending have also affected access to health services. Poor women in developing countries suffer under drastically inadequate or
lack of access to healthcare, especially maternal care. Annually, approximately 500,000 women die during childbirth. This means that hundreds of thousands of women across the world still die preventable deaths. In 2005, 99% of an estimated total of 536,000 maternal deaths worldwide occurred in developing countries, of which more than half were in sub-Saharan Africa, followed by South Asia. Reflecting women's lack of sexual autonomy, over half of the estimated 33 million people living with HIV worldwide are women, and 77% of adult women with HIV live in sub-Saharan Africa – an estimated 12 million out of the 15.5 million worldwide.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

8. It is estimated that one in three women is beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused by an intimate partner in the course of her lifetime. One in five women experiences rape or attempted rape. However, violence against women is not concentrated in developing countries. For example, in Germany, 25% of all households and partnerships experience domestic violence.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

9. Human trafficking is a phenomenon specifically associated with globalisation. Deregulation and liberalisation cause the growth of the informal economy, which frequently overlaps with illegal economic activity. According to statistics from the European Union, about 500,000 women are forced into prostitution in Western Europe annually, of which the majority hail from Eastern Europe. In 2005 in Germany alone, 317 legal proceedings involved 614 victims of trafficking. Traffickers earn huge profits by exploiting trafficked persons as workers or prostitutes. The International Labour Organisation estimates that worldwide every year 2.4 million people become victims of traffickers, creating financial gain for the traffickers of 32 billion US dollars per year. A US government-sponsored study in 2006 found that 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders annually, in addition to millions trafficked within their own borders. Approximately 80% of the transnational trafficked victims are women and girls. Girls constitute up to 50% of the total. Human trafficking is also widespread in South Africa. A 2000 study showed between 28,000 and 38,000 children prostituted in South Africa while a 2003 study by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) exposed South Africa as the main destination for human trafficking in Southern Africa. Although a lot of extra-regional trafficking takes place from places like Thailand, China and Eastern Europe, research from IOM found that a significant amount of trafficking within the region also takes place, i.e. trafficking of African people by Africans through Southern Africa. The six-month study revealed that much of the trafficking involves women and children from southern African countries destined for the sex trade industry in South Africa or Europe. The sex industry in South Africa also imports women from Asia, Eastern Europe, and Russia.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

10. The economic and social plight of women, resulting in part from policies of globalisation and in part from patriarchal cultural heritages, calls Christians to look at these tragic statistics and respond as servants and spokespersons for the vulnerable, the harmed, and the marginalised.

11. We celebrate the different cultures and the rich diversity of local communities in the global world and at the same time acknowledge the theological tension of witnessing the universal and the particular truth in diverse local communities. We remain convinced that all forms of discrimination against and exploitation of women, frequently compounded by discriminations on the basis of race, class, sexuality and gender representation, are incompatible with the gospel. Discrimination deprives women of liberated living as children of God. We take it as axiomatic that God instils talents and capacities in every human child whose cultivation is required for the fulfilment of individual lives and for the benefit of society. Justice requires that these capacities be respected and that social arrangements favour their development. Established gender traditions, very often with religious sanction, violate this principle and define roles for women and men that stunt the development of their God-given capacities. Social and individual harm results from the perpetuation of these unjust arrangements, as they bear on intimate relations as well as public relations.

12. A distinctive form of gender injustice developed with the rise of democracy and capitalism in the West, where manhood came to be defined as fitness for the incessant struggle in the “man’s world” of politics and business. The warrior traits required for success in a competition among self-seeking entrepreneurs became synonymous with manhood. The stunting of innate capacities in men, and the systematic isolation, vulnerability, and humiliation imposed on them, yielded a dreadful harvest in the abuse of women and in social policies denying women the legitimate exercise of their God-given capacities.

13. The globalised world of the 21st century adds complexity to the webs of relations that constitute the political, economical,
civil and religious spheres in which we live. We acknowledge that discrimination against women is most often related to other forms of discrimination. Discrimination is in many cases a culmination of gender-race-class-sexuality discrimination that acts against the well being of women. These double and triple forms of discrimination make women extremely vulnerable and produce concrete forms of physical, spiritual and emotional abuse. These discriminations take place in the global discourses as ways of exclusion and in the local context as being negatively stereotyped and oppressed.

14. As processes of globalisation have grown predominant, at least three consequences have followed: (a) Non-Western cultures with gender hierarchies that likewise deny equal rights to women have found support from the Western example. Non-Christian religious systems that wrap this unjust arrangement in the garments of sacredness were confirmed by the prestige flowing from the analogy to Christian practice in the West. (b) The culture of capitalist individualism likewise served as a model for non-western economies, cutting across time-honoured traditions of mutual obligation. The result was the cultivation of a form of masculinity that, in the West, resulted in the relegation of women to an inherently abusive status. (c) As the misery resulting from predatory imperialist enterprises grew more severe, increasingly pervasive violence and injustice flowed into the relations of women and men. The international sexual trafficking of women trade is a notable instance of this.

15. These developments alert us to the growing gap between the powerful and the vulnerable. This report shows that women comprise the largest portion of the most vulnerable and the world’s poor. Women dominate the world’s devastating statistics on poverty, malnutrition, lack of sufficient health care, limited access to quality education, unfair labour practices and little or no property rights. These conditions concern the church, the theologians and fellow believers in Christ. Again we think and pray together to find ways to articulate hope for today in such a way that real solutions and better realities can become possible for those whose sufferings are unbearable.

16. The Lordship of Christ reveals a new humanity and a relational anthropology in Christ. Humanity can envision a new relatedness in Christ’s image. It is in Christ’s relatedness towards us that non-relationality is overcome and we are established in a new humanity. Christ moves us from non-relational apathetic beings to relational and compassionate beings. This relatedness questions hierarchical patterns and enables us to relate anew with one another as respected children of God. Our traditional theological language has used male language and symbols for God that have affirmed domination. The church and theological arguments should acknowledge that the symbols of gender, race, and class are socially constructed.

17. We are called to acknowledge this new relatedness to one another and to live our discipleship in its implications. This relational anthropology enables us to view ourselves as ‘neighbours’ and realise that all humans are made in the image of God. This reflection on the image of God and our participation in the image questions the spirit of individualism and fosters growth towards mature koinonia. This relatedness to one another brings awareness that some benefit at the hands of others and that some suffer at the hands of others.

18. An understanding of humanity’s participation in the image of God in Christ’s new community provides a community that challenges and questions domination and oppression and lives a new reality of respect, compassion and justice in and through Christ. In this new humanity both female and male are liberated through new gender relations.

19. A critical principle of feminist theology is that the human condition and the doctrine of divine revelation are interrelated. It is therefore crucial that the experience of women form part of the discourse on the condition of humanity. Male experience and male reality are not the only realities and therefore cannot be the norm. Women need to voice their own realities according to their understanding and experience. The reality of the more vulnerable and marginalised cannot be formulated by others with assumptions that ‘women’ are heard and understood in political, economical and theological discussions. It is through identities embedded in the new community of Christ that it becomes possible to hear and see women’s suffering and the impact of exploitation.

20. We therefore reject the ideology of male dominance and continue to critique forms of hierarchy based on gender that exist within society. This remains crucial in a world where the power continues to enhance the dominant male voices and therefore works to diminish women’s voices in public discourse. We mourn the role that the church and religion has and is playing in sustaining and justifying these harmful relations – oppressing women and diminishing their creative contributions. We deny the validity of all religious claims – however they may be justified, by whatever tradition of religious teaching – that affirms the subservience of women.
to men, subordinating the development of women’s capacities to those of men, or cultivating men’s capacities at the expense of women.

21. In a time when greed and selfishness flourish in a consumerist, materialist culture, reflection on Christ in whom we belong could foster a spirit of less self-indulgence. We acknowledge that the social world is not the ‘order of creation’ given by God. The church should therefore work towards transforming traditions and structures where women have been historically and theologically excluded from fulfilling their calling.

22. A theology of gender justice in a globalised world is part of the ongoing discourse of social justice and an appropriate Christian response to the globalised world in which we live. The Christian community cannot adequately address these questions without hearing and seeing the statistics raised in this report and the reality they represent – the plight and voice of those unheard. Christ calls the church to listen and take to heart those who are vulnerable and suffering. Only then can the human condition and the doctrine of divine reality become truly interrelated and all of humanity gracefully reap the fruit of God’s salvation.

CALL TO ACTION FOR GENDER JUSTICE

23. The reality of gender injustice has been influenced by many factors of globalisation. Globalisation has brought a more interconnected reality through travelling, the internet and the availability of information. This interconnectedness made it possible for women’s movements to have access to important information and ways to form networks to strengthen the quest for a more gender just society across the globe. It poses immense opportunities to combine strengths to advocate for gender just societies. It has also, however, given new and unheard of opportunities for scandalous and criminal exploitation of women.

24. The feminist movements of different parts of the world have experienced milestone events in their historical settings to mark progress toward the establishing of justice for women. This is to be applauded and welcomed. But it is just as clear that the outcomes are different and are measured differently. Progress remains precarious in light of the many economic changes and pressures, growing tendencies towards patriarchal political pressures and much work remains to be done to erase the legacy of patriarchy. In many cases the same countries who claim progress in gender justice matters participate in global economic and political policies which foster a social environment in which women in other parts of the world are undermined and trapped in vulnerability and vicious cycles of threat, want and violence. We are called to act in witness to our faith to address this within and outside our communities in order to realise the coming of a new humanity, a new community of women and men.

25. Within our own church community we must examine the reality and on-going power of male privilege as expressed in the structures of governance and positions of influence in our congregations and communities. If our witness to gender justice is based on integrity we must develop and promote female leadership in our own institutions. We must examine and change, where appropriate, our practices of ecclesiastical employment to reflect our commitment to gender justice. Our church budgets as moral documents must allocate church financial resources to reflect gender justice and our Christian education must include specific address of gender justice. Our liturgy, music, and language must express a consciousness of inclusiveness and gender equality. Within the church we must consciously raise sensitivity regarding sexual harassment, make provision for the church to act upon it.

26. Economic Action. As Christian global citizens we must stand with and speak for the victims of gender injustice in the economic realm. In seeking economic justice for women we must support equal wages for equal work; fair employment conditions; policies that promote equal parenting and sharing of domestic labour between women and men; and policies that provide homemakers and those who provide family care an economic safety net with benefits equivalent to those provided by employment outside the home. Women must be educated in financial management and democratic citizenship, learning to exercise the right to manage their own earnings and property.

27. Political Action. In addressing gender injustice we must seek and support qualified women candidates for political office. We must initiate and support policies and laws that promote gender justice, including but not limited to quotas reflecting equal presence and influence of women and men in civil service and in the judiciary; the promotion of women’s human rights in all spheres of society; and the protection of the rights of sexual and gender minorities. We must support and encourage gender justice opinion makers in an on-going effort to change hearts and minds.

28. Education Action. The church must support educational opportunities for women through programmes of equal access to education and the right to remain in school regardless of age, pregnancy, family responsibility or gender identity. We must encourage government campaigns and education at
school level for girls and boys that counteract patriarchal ideas of women’s purported second class status and subservient roles in society, as well as discrimination against lesbians. We must support women’s access to and funding for higher education and professional education and we must work to include gender justice in public education curricula.

29. **Health.** The disastrous reality of women’s death rate because of lack of healthcare and prenatal care calls us to work for government policies that acknowledge women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. Policies should confirm women’s bodily integrity and autonomy and assure access to healthcare for girls and women, and transform state hospitals and clinics into spaces that uphold women’s human rights. We must work for health education that enables women to provide self care and protect themselves from physical abuse, sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. We must support government programmes that provide medical care and medications for women with tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS.

30. **Violence.** The omnipresence of violence against women asks Christians to seek government criminalisation of domestic violence and marital rape; added penalties for rape and other forms of sexual violence, including the targeting of lesbians; the transformation of criminal justice systems to protect women’s human rights; and to support the development of a system of shelters, rehabilitation processes and counselling for victims and perpetrators of violence. We seek to initiate and develop education for conflict resolution. Finally, the horror of human trafficking and human slavery calls Christians to work to stop this phenomenon, to seek governmental action to criminalise human trafficking and to enforce criminal codes which make slavery a crime.
Every act of violence leads to new violence.
GLOBALISED VIOLENCE: A LONG HISTORY

1. War is a tragic, continuous constant in the history of humankind. During the past century, in technology and medicine, humanity has made enormous progress. But in terms of warlike violence we are still stuck in the Stone Age. The mental and financial cost of preparing and conducting war still by far exceeds the efforts invested in building up civil forms of conflict resolution. The myth of the “redeeming power of violence” continues unbroken in politics and society and has a long, sometimes suppressed history, as can be seen in the devastating wars and revolutions of the past century. From a European perspective it is particularly the two World Wars that determine the general consciousness, as well as the ensuing “Cold War” between the two superpowers of the time. It wasn’t actually as “cold” as we were led to believe, given the insane atomic arms race and the resultant further impoverishment of the developing countries, and the actual hot proxy wars that were carried out in third world countries. The best known example of this is perhaps the Vietnam War, but the same practice was carried out in Angola and Mozambique.

2. People of the southern hemisphere, particularly in Africa and South America, however, have quite a different view. For them history was, and is not only, characterized by their own conflicts, but also by the continuous humiliation and violation of their cultures through colonial suppression, war and genocide, particularly by the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the rest of Europe. These genocidal patterns are now being inflicted upon the people of the South by the South itself, for example Rwanda, Burundi and most recently Sudan.

3. The history of violence however did not end there. Not only the Soviet Union and Europe, but also the support in the “post-war era” rendered to murderous dictatorships in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa by the USA demonstrates a readiness for violence tolerated by all Western democracies. The genocide in East Timor, the responsibility of the CIA for the supply of weapons of mass destruction to Iraq, the training of death squads and “specialized” agents like Osama bin Laden, or the financing and training of the mujahedins in Afghanistan are only a few examples that show the unrestrained deployment of violence and terror in the foreign policy of the imperial powers and their proxies if it serves their own interests.

4. The true reasons for engendering war have for a long time been disguised with the cloak of freedom, democracy and human rights as if the aim justified every means. However, Christians are called to expose all true motivations behind our propensity for war and continue to resist war as such and all justifications for it. After the demise of the Warsaw Pact, NATO was left without an identifiable enemy. Despite this ideological vacuum, and at the cost of clashes with Russia and others over the last number of years, it was expanded mainly eastwards and its radius of action extended to cover the whole globe, instead of using this as an opportunity to explore possibilities for global peace-making that the peace dividend presented.

THE TWO SIDES TO THE CURRENT GLOBAL TERROR

5. September 11, 2001 and all subsequent acts of terror cannot but be condemned in the strongest possible terms. This act, which led to a new global field of conflict, reveals causes which go far back behind the attack on the World Trade Center. We will only fathom this terror more accurately if we recognize it also as a response to a long history of colonialism, exploitation of the situation in the Middle East and the more recent demonization of Muslims as a group. Our argument is that the reasons for the reality of global terror are much more complex than is usually presented.

6. However, whoever in their own actions are not interested in the causes of non-state terror and constantly make a taboo of their own potential for violence, can wage an ever so imposing “war on terror” and pass it off – religiously elevated – as a struggle for “enduring freedom”. Nevertheless, or perhaps exactly because of this, they will never be victorious either with God or with grand military operations. One can neither wage a “war” against an invisible, non-state opponent determined to die, nor can such a “war” ever be won. One cannot even, as was customary in the case of classical wars, end it by means of a peace treaty.

7. The nearly nine year old unsuccessful tragedy of the escalating war in Afghanistan by NATO forces and the contradictory problem of its justification speak a clear language and reveal a political, military and ethical failure at the expense of the civilian population and the soldiers deployed there. Unclear or hidden interests and aims, and the elevation of the USA and NATO to a world police force without sufficient knowledge of local historical, cultural, political and religious conditions, demonstrate perhaps a well meant but dangerous neo-colonial notion of having been called as the “saviour of the world”. This has new conflict potential as the source of new terror while the aim should exactly be to seek conflict resolutions. As the Accra
Confession states, we look at this situation through the eyes of the victims and those who suffer from the terror inflicted upon them from sides of the conflict.

8. The fact that in the West only now after nine years a political strategy debate about this war is being conducted not only shows the current helplessness but also the old, still continuing mistaken belief of being able to bring about good and speedy solutions through violent wars and pacify the world by eradicating the putative evil. States and alliances of states which aim to get rid of evil instead of containing it, turn into powers of terror themselves. The doubtless recognisable traces of success in civilian reconstruction in the Hindukush are undermined by the growing number of civilian victims of dubious military actions, by the supplying ever and again of new retrospective justifications for the action that leave the interests of the actors unclarified, by concealment of the damages and half-hearted apologies as well as insensitive behaviour of the occupiers. What was perhaps meant as assistance is more and more felt by the victims as terror. These often see a violent reaction as the only means of expressing their own helplessness, or it serves the ideologically blinded as a justification for their own terror. Terror networks and state terror must therefore be recognized as two mutually dependent sides of the one global reality. Together they constitute the current danger of global “mega-terrorism”.

RELIGION AS MOTIVATING FORCE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR VIOLENCE

9. Al Qaida and the Taliban have rightfully been accused of religious fundamentalism and the misuse of religion for the justification of violence. The “jihad” which is described in the Qur'an as a spiritual struggle against human godlessness was turned by Bin Laden and others into a Trojan horse for their own terrorist fantasies of violence. However, the whole extent of global “mega-terrorism” only becomes clear in the light of very similar tendencies in the rhetoric and patterns of action of Western states and alliances. On both sides the discourse is about a good and justified “war against evil”; on both sides the only good enemy is a dead enemy, civilian deaths are condoned; the evil in the world must be removed through the death of the evil ones; one’s own readiness for violence is justified by the malice of the opponent, and the claim holds sway of being the only saviour of the world. A further cause of global mega-terrorism is therefore – driven equally by private terror groups and by states – the mutual self-immunization and instrumentalization of religion for the self-justification of one’s own propensity for violence. Liberation from this dramatic, seemingly unending spiral of violence can only be brought about through spiritual renewal and a change of political mindset, but never through war.

ENERGY SECURITY AND GLOBALISED WAR

10. Ostensibly the second war in Iraq is about democracy and human rights. But this is not the whole truth. Since 2002 the USA and Europe have officially declared energy security as the main aim of their foreign and security policy. The huge oil reserves of Iraq were the further greater incentive for the war there. The great battle for these diminishing resources explains the change, for example, of NATO doctrine, first pronounced in 1999, that is, long before 11 September 2001. The original purely defensive maxim was altered to an active “out-of-area” strategy without regional limitation after 9/11. This change makes the inner connection between globalisation and militarization abundantly clear. Thus the war in Afghanistan can also not been seen simply as a mere demonstration of Western responsibility for the protection of human rights. Afghanistan is an important political and military basis for sharing in the future exploitation of the gigantic raw material resources around the Caspian Sea.

BIBLICAL IMPETUS AS ORIENTATION AND RESPONSE TO THE SITUATION

Let us summarize the principles of biblical peace ethics in point form:

11. Without peace with God there can be no comprehensive peace (Shalom) on earth. The church therefore confesses: Jesus Christ is the beginning, the way and the goal of all peace. He alone is the foundation of the perception, proclamation and action of the church (Barmen I, Belhar 4).

STATES AND ALLIANCES OF STATES WHICH AIM TO GET RID OF EVIL INSTEAD OF CONTAINING IT, TURN INTO POWERS OF TERROR THEMSELVES.

5). Through Him we experience liberation from all godless bonds, for thankful service to all creation (Barmen III). Only through God’s action in Jesus Christ can the world find the peace which it cannot give itself. This peace granted by God has several aspects.

12. God concludes peace with the world in that Jesus Christ died “for” the godless and not “against” them. The saving death of Jesus “for all”, also and especially for those who are other than we are, undermines every exclusion, demonization or annihilation of other people, religions, cultures. Peace is more than harmony between the like and the like-minded. God’s work of reconciliation is greater than human wisdom and
human conceptions of peace. There is no redemption of the world through rejection of “the others” or destruction of “the (allegedly) evil”, but only through the overcoming of the evil in us and among us in the spirit of God’s one act of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Reconciled diversity is the social form of the peace granted by God in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3, 28).

13. “Christ died for us while we were still godless” (Rom. 5, 8). God’s act of reconciliation reflects a unilateral advance of trust as proof of sincerity for the opponent. Peace grows only through unilateral initiatives establishing trust. Peace is made through faithfulness to community although the other is as he is, but not by unfulfillable demands, threatening gestures or military means of deterrence. Peace cannot be ordered; one must be invited to peace. The peace of God needs people who themselves risk the first step.

14. The peace of Christ is a peace which has made itself vulnerable and remains vulnerable. Not even in self-defence (Matt. 26, 52ff) did Christ interrupt his way of consistently breaking through spirals of violence. Even self-protection was for him no reason to take up the sword and give the enemy further justification for his own violence. The Risen One still bears the marks of his wounds (Luke 24, 39f). The peace of Christ is not to be had without vulnerability. Peace is the opposite of armed security (Bonhoeffer). Peace is always a risk which through its own vulnerability helps the enemy to be more than a perpetrator of violence (Ghandī). Christ shamed his enemies through freedom from force and broke through the eternal vicious circle of violence and counter-violence. The peace of Christ challenges the whole person and requires courageous discipleship which would rather win the enemy for a common future instead of simply wanting to defeat him.

15. In the crucified Christ God puts himself at the side of all victims of violence and becomes their advocate and brother. With the risen Christ all the violated of this world are restored to the rights and dignity which the world has withheld from them. The peace of Christ is a “just peace”. Against the universal right of the stronger he sets the strengthening of right as the strengthening precisely of the victims of injustice and violence. Brotherliness to the victims is a mark of the church of Jesus Christ. The least in the eyes of the world are not only tolerated in the body of Christ. God has given them “higher honour” than all others (1 Cor. 12, 24) in order to overcome in its core all kinds of division between people. To overlook the victims of injustice and violence, to forget them or subordinate them to one’s own self-made goals, means crucifying Christ again, denying God and gambling peace away.

16. The peace of Christ seeks and ever and again achieves a social and legal form, first in the Christian community but also in the world. The justification of the ungodly seeks its correspondence in human justice. However, since God’s righteousness is always more and greater than the righteousness of the world, it never passes over without remainder into enacted law. Yet the laws humanly framed in church and state can and should ever and again correspond anew to the reality of God’s reconciliation in Jesus Christ and mirror something of it. Church and world can and should be analogies for the kingdom of God.

17. The peace of Christ is not realised in maintaining and securing God’s benefits and human wellbeing through laws, frontiers and weapons. It is realised in correspondence to the peace of Christ as a free and thankful act of dedication to the neighbour (the least) and in sharing God’s good creation. Life is not secured by grabbing and accumulating things, but through trust in God as the giver of all gifts and sharing the goods of creation. Peace will come about if we revise our concept of property and change our economic system in such a way that it does not produce hunger and injustice but puts the poor at the centre of all decisions.

18. The peace of Christ alone is a divine power. All other powers and forces are and remain something worldly and thereby open to criticism and correction. God is the liberating Lord and nothing else may claim holiness (Ex 20: 2-3). For Christians, all values, including so-called “Western values” must be scrutinized in the light of the lordship of Christ and should be demythologized. Accordingly, freedom and democracy are not absolute values and timeless remedies for which one can bomb a country. Freedom without faithfulness to community with the oppressed of every age is nothing more than cynical and destructive arbitrariness. A culture that adores its own values rather than God’s justice and enforces them with violence is neither just before God nor is it sustainable.

19. The peace of Christ is a constant risk of the free, responsible deed. It neither promises success nor can it be protected by anything. But it is the only responsible way of overcoming evil with good in a sustainable fashion. Human beings cannot and should not conquer evil through the destruction of the evil-doers, but through overcoming it in and among themselves. Evil is the attempt to assume the role of Lord over good and evil oneself, to pronounce final judgment on others, and unilaterally always to project one’s own evil onto others and to demonize them. In contrast, in the preaching of Jesus, God deliberately sets the sun to rise over the good and the evil (Mt 5: 45). “Taliban” or “terrorists” should therefore despite
their many atrocities not be demonized or confidently killed, they are human beings who can and should be won over for a shared future. Peace is only possible with the enemy, not against or without them. The old “civilizing white man’s burden” (Rudyard Kipling) of the colonial era, of conquering the alien and evil by exterminating the evil ones or the putatively inferior people, is itself the source of war and genocide.

20. Every act of violence leads to new violence; therefore violence itself must be prevented and removed from the world through active and creative freedom from violence. Freedom from violence is not inactive passivity, but is based on active nonviolence in the way Gandhi further developed and successfully employed the work of Christ in the struggle for liberation in India. Jesus blessed those who, though vulnerable, stood up and worked for peace, who through their gentleness and hunger for justice actively establish peace (Mt. 5: 5,9,10) and break the spirals of violence by acts of healing disobedience, disarming honesty, and overflowing friendliness in order to win the enemy’s trust, instead of aiming to subjugate them (Mt. 5: 39). This includes the active acceptance of suffering. The issue today therefore cannot be to build up a security apparatus to protect us from others, but to develop security partnerships with others, even with the enemy. Even so-called “humanitarian military deployments” over time provoke more and more counter-violence and are hardly suited to a creative, sustainable overcoming of hostility. In extreme cases military operations may be called for in order to prevent worse violence. However, they always carry the seed of escalation and injustice in them, and it is the prophetic calling of the church neither to romanticize them nor to act naively, but be always aware of the deep violence that lurks inside our societies.

21. The “just war” doctrine is therefore not only a contradiction in terms and incompatible with the Christ-reality, but was actively overcome by Christ himself. The model for the church’s preaching and action therefore becomes “just peace” which is made possible in Christ as an expression of God’s community-faithfulness to all people. As such, Christ is the beacon of hope for the whole world. Peace and security are no longer the product of power-political efforts but the fruit of the righteousness and community faithfulness of God (Is. 32: 17). The acceptance and inclusion of the disadvantaged and “sinners” of this world, i.e., those who are powerless and excluded from the community, serves everyone and prevents terror as the language of violence against exclusion and powerlessness.

22. The Bible is aware of the dangers of too much state (Rev 13: The state as a devouring beast; Mk 12: 17: Don’t give to Caesar what belongs to God…) and of too little state through the privatization of faith and power (Rom. 13). As a result of neoliberal ideology, globalisation shows giant regulatory deficits, not only in the economic sphere but in the political field generally. In this area of deficit, forms of privatized violence spring up. Public debate is therefore necessary on the speedy realization of national and international democratic structures and institutions bound by international and human rights law, on shaping and dealing with living together as a global community, and on possibilities of civil conflict resolution. These international institutions must be resourced by the national states and political alliances in a way that will enable the participation of all people as well as being independent, transparent, credible and capable of taking action.

23. In the age of globalisation, foreign and security politics are increasingly becoming “internal world politics”. In this context peace politics is also, and particularly, the politics of law and order. As Paul Lehmann says, freedom is the presupposition and the condition of order; order is not the presupposition and condition of freedom. Justice is the foundation and criterion of law; law is not the foundation and criterion of justice. These are the proper priorities of politics. In this connection the issue cannot be to create a global super-state (too much state), but rather international and federal structures and institutions bound by law and the separation of powers and capable also of enforcing the law, primarily by civil means, and if necessary by use of a transnational police force which always remains subject to the law (cf. Barmen V). If on the grounds of its external history, Europe has become guilty vis-à-vis the countries of the South, it can also on the basis of its internal history serve as a model of a multinational region which after many wars has finally found peace through the law, and can contribute important experiences to the world as a whole.

24. Here the world-wide family of Reformed churches because of its knowledge of the necessity and the possibilities of good orders and rules in church and state, which transcend mere individual ethical peace actions and can themselves provide impulses for peace among individuals and groups, also has a special task. It cannot be a state itself, but through its witness to peace it can encourage more and better statehood. Peace does not always want to be achieved only against existing orders, but be supported and fostered by peace-enabling local and global structures. Furthermore, shaping the world in the spirit of Christ does not happen through a display of imperial power but through violence-free service to justice and the law.
GUIDELINES FOR GLOBAL AND CIVILIAN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The following guidelines can in accordance with the biblical impulses for a “just peace” point to the new direction. For the Church of Christ these include:

25. Raising its own ecumenical and global voice for the strengthening of the law against the law of the strong.

26. Remembering the history of the victims of all imperial as well as gratuitous violence.

27. Translating the biblical peace impulses into action at all levels in its own church life as a credible light for the world.

28. Intensifying and networking of the existing ecumenical contacts, to establish a critical church peace platform.

29. Assistance in building a civil society, national and international network of peace services and conflict management institutions as a recognized institutional partner and a realistic political option ahead of military conflicts.

30. Improved financial and political strengthening of the UN by the national states and alliances.


32. In principle, subordination of military alliances to the international mandate of the UN, no unilateral actions of countries or alliances.

33. In cases of breaches, definition as well as implementation of the political consequences and sanctions through UN institutions.

34. Binding of all states to international law, the International Court of Justice in The Hague and the International Criminal Court as a prerequisite for a UN mandate.

35. Continuous development of transnational institutions and structures for the de-escalation of violence, and with the purpose of building a police force oriented to protecting the right to, and the preservation of life of all people as a long-term alternative to military structures.

36. Freezing and reduction of current armaments budgets, transformation of the armaments industry in favor of police and civilian needs, no more tax-exempt status for the military-industrial complex, but these should be channelized for work opportunities for sustainable peace-ethical purposes.

37. Outlawing and abolishment of all weapons of mass destruction, general disarmament and weapons control by the UN.

38. Downsizing of NATO over the medium term to a purely defensive alliance limited to the area of its member countries, and its long-term transformation into an international organization for civilian police conflict management in the service of the UN.

39. Improved training of the international police deployment forces in terms of intercultural and interfaith communication.

40. Development of a global concept of prosperity in the spirit of the UN concept of “human security” and “human development”, as an international protection against institutionalised poverty and both state and privatized violence.

41. Combating terror by means of the full concentration of all resources on the development of constitutionally legal force, education, development partnerships and participation, not through war.

“There’s no way to peace, peace is the way.”
(Martin Luther King Jr.)
WE JOIN HANDS IN THE QUEST FOR

COMPASSIONATE

JUSTICE
CHAPTER 12
A Call to Prophetic Action for the Churches

1. The Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa share a rich history of naming, engaging and confronting the worldly powers of separation and estrangement, conflict and alienation, dehumanisation and injustice. During the struggle against apartheid we shared a common commitment to compassionate justice that is manifested in unity and togetherness, reconciliation and peace, human dignity and the flourishing of all creation. And now in new times, specifically in the age of political, cultural and especially economic globalisation, we join hands in the quest for compassionate justice.

In line with the Accra Confession these two churches believe that churches all over the world are called to covenant for justice. We are called to prophetic action amidst the immense challenges that we face in local, regional and global contexts.

2. Prophetic action in search of compassionate justice takes place in various modes. These modes are prophetic envisioning, prophetic criticism, prophetic story-telling, prophetic analysis and prophetic policymaking.

3. Moreover, churches in various forms, participate in appropriate ways in these modes of prophetic action. In four institutional forms churches act obediently, i.e., through our worship; through congregations with their various practices like preaching, teaching, catechesis, prayers, hymns, liturgies, celebration of sacraments, diaconate, public witness, discussion forums, pastoral care, youth, women's and men's organisations, meetings etc.; through denominations with their various structures; through ecumenical initiatives.

Churches also act prophetically through its manifestation as organism, i.e. through individual Christians in their normal daily roles in the circles of family, work, friendship, etc.; and through individual Christians who participate in voluntary initiatives in the context of civil society, and from within the perspective of the global church.

4. Churches act in collaboration with other institutions in society. To actualise compassionate justice we join hands with institutions and with those who play critical roles in political and economic spheres, as well as in civil society and the area of public opinion-formation. And this collaboration in search of the virtuous life for all, which takes place on local, national, continental and global levels, in an exciting web of bi-lateral, multi-lateral, inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary manifestations.

PROPHETIC ENVISIONING OF A NEW GLOBAL SOCIETY OF COMPASSIONATE JUSTICE

5. As prophets we are called to the task of envisioning. Prophets see a new world in which the strife and suffering caused by various injustices we currently experience are overcome. This vision may indict the contemporary broken reality, but its main function is to allure and attract people to act concretely and to attempt to approximate the vision. The prophet, as a visionary, uses utopian language, symbols, analogies, similes, and metaphors that move us. Prophetic speech is not a technical moral argument or policy statements. Hearer are moved by aspects like passion of the speaker’s voice, the cadences and figures of speech, many drawn from the Bible, that are employed, and also the moral authenticity of the speaker. Such visionary language moves us from indignation with the present to aspiration for the future.

6. So we are moved and inspired by the vision of a society of compassionate justice. Compassionate justice is first of all the justice of the triune God. According to the Bible, God’s justice is liberating, caring, merciful, saving justice. It is God’s faithfulness to the covenant, to God’s own promises. According to the Bible, this God hears the cries and prayers of people in need, this God sees the plight of those enslaved by powers and principalities, things seen and unseen and burdened into suffering by them. This God cares, liberates and sets free, heals, comforts, forgives, accepts, justifies, renews and saves, all out of compassionate justice.

7. In a world full of injustice and enmity, this God of the Bible is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged. This God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry, frees the prisoners and restores sight to the blind, supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows, blocks the path of the ungodly, and frustrates the way of the wicked. This is the Lord who remains faithful and reigns forever. (Ps 146)

8. The Triune God of compassionate justice calls the church to follow God in these paths, to live, to embody the same compassionate justice – if they indeed worship this God in truth. Pure and undefiled faith for this God is to visit orphans and widows in their suffering; always to do what is good and to seek what is right, to stand by people in any form of suffering and need, to witness and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

10. And so, regarding our vision for gender justice in a global context prophetic envisioning entails fresh confirmation that
males and females live in inter-relatedness and inter-dependency. Hierarchical patterns give way to partnership and reciprocity, friendship and compassion. This vision of relationality and interdependency moves us away from domination and oppression in gender matters, to respect and compassion, koinonia and justice.

11. In a world with a global food crisis, we remember the vision of abundant life, life in fullness for all God’s people and for all of creation. In a world where so many live in undignified circumstances, undernourishment and malnourishment, where millions die of hunger, we remember the vision of a society where human dignity as an inalienable gift of God is acknowledged, confirmed and actualised.

12. In a world where millions do not have access to water, we remember the biblical vision that water is life; that without water the emergence of life on earth is impossible. We prophetically remember that waters and wells, rivers and raindrops are blessings of the life-giving Lord.

13. And in a world of violence and bloodshed, war and global terrorism, we prophetically proclaim and preach the vision of a society where swords are beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isaiah 2:4); where the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness quietness and confidence forever, and where God’s people will abide in peaceful habitation, in secure dwelling places, and in quiet resting places (Isaiah 32: 17 and 18).

PROPHETIC CRITICISM

14. Our prophetic role also entails courageous criticism where the vision of justice is not fulfilled, as in current global arrangements. Besides enunciation, prophets have the task of denunciation. Besides the task of announcing the vision of a new society, prophets perform the task of denouncing the reality that is in conflict with the vision of this new society.

15. The church, belonging to the God of compassionate justice, is called to stand where God stands, namely against all forms of injustice and with the wronged. The church, following this Christ, is called to witness against all those in positions of power and privilege who selfishly seek to use their power not to serve others but only their own self-interest by controlling and harming others.

16. This courageous prophetic criticism is to be heard regarding various developments in a globalising world. It is to be offered when we are confronted with the negative consequences of globalisation for the most vulnerable ones in the world. So we offer prophetic criticism when we expose the bankruptcy of the current economic paradigm. The global credit crunch and the global banking crisis reflect this bankruptcy. It exposes the concept of self-regulating markets, and the idea that liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation would lead to the best of all worlds, as pure ideology as distortion of justice.

17. Prophetic criticism should be heard in a world where millions die of hunger because of arrangements like the production of energy plants for car tanks in competition with the cultivation of food for the stomachs of the hungry, and the neglect of the development of small farming agriculture in the interest of large scale producers and international concerns.

18. Prophetic criticism is to be made when machismo is elevated as the criterion for success in democratic and capitalistic societies; when men are treated without dignity and humiliation, producing a dreadful harvest in the abuse of

THE CHURCH...IS CALLED TO WITNESS AGAINST ALL THOSE IN POSITIONS OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE WHO SELFISHLY SEEK TO USE THEIR POWER NOT TO SERVE OTHERS BUT ONLY THEIR OWN SELF-INTEREST BY CONTROLLING AND HARMING OTHERS.

The prophet as critic addresses what is perceived as the root of the problem. The problem is not merely viewed as a matter of policies that are inadequate and wrong, but it is a matter of religious, moral and social waywardness. The critic names the devil which presumably underlies the various wrongs in society. Prophetic criticism gets to the roots of problems that pervade institutions, societies and cultures, or that pervades the actions and behaviour of individual persons. On the basis of statistical indicators and social analysis they expose the causes and roots of social and personal wrongs. The indictments of the prophet as critic construe the human condition in deep and broad proportions. And these prophetic indictments lead to conviction of guilt, and constitute a call to a fundamental repentance and a radical turn from unfaithfulness to faithfulness, from injustice to justice. Employing the notion of empire to describe current global arrangements constitutes a clear and courageous act of prophetic criticism and denunciation.
PROPHETIC STORY-TELLING

19. The third dimension of our prophetic calling is to do story-telling. Stories form moral identity when they rehearse communities’ history, memory of moments of resistance, liberation, reconciliation and healing. The living tradition and truth transmitted through narratives, liturgies, rites, and symbols, which shape the ethos, vision, virtue and character, the values and outlooks as well as the moral interests and determining moral convictions of the community. Narratives do not provide single, clear and argued answers to specific moral cases, but they do provide nuanced and subtle illumination of the challenges that are faced and of possible outcomes. They show us features of life that are somehow excluded from technical abstract argumentation. Narratives do not offer distinctions and arguments, but they evoke imagination and stimulate our moral sensibilities and affections. And although they do not give clear and decisive conclusions, they do enlarge one’s vision of what is going on. Stories do not offer theories of justice or injustice, but they offer concrete examples of justice and in justice and the consequences of those on the lives of real people.

20. We are called to prophetically tell the stories of factory workers in South Africa who lose their work because of global trade and subsidy arrangements that feed the unending greed of the rich at the expense of the poor and needy. We prophetically tell the stories of the women and children, the aged and sick of Afghanistan who do not even know how to spell the words, peaceful society, anymore. We prophetically tell and are moved by the stories of those millions of women all over the world who suffer rape, exploitation, abuse, human trafficking. We prophetically tell the stories of unemployment, insecurity and degradation when corporations close their production plants in the Northern context and take them to places in the South where they have less labour and environmental laws, so that profits are maximised. We tell the story of what we see and hear: the story of the dairy farmer in Ostfriesland who, under pressure from the global economic crisis and the insistence on artificial pricing lost all hope of surviving and killed himself.

PROPHETIC ANALYSIS

21. Our prophetic task entails that we engage in continuous technical analysis of the challenges that we face in the context of globalisation. In technical discourses the wording of the prophet must be painstakingly accurate. Concepts need to be defined in a clear, comprehensive and concise manner. Clear thinking, precise use of words and compelling reasoning facilitate the engagement of theology with public life. The ethical discourse helps to make narratives public and to translate the passionate pleas of the prophet into rationally defensible public positions. And by assisting these discourses to be more vocal and public in credible and constructive ways, an impact is made on the formation of public opinion, public ethos, public Zeitgeist/thinking and eventually on public policy.

22. The analysis that we are engaged in should not lead to paralysis. It, on the contrary, inspires us to concrete action. Therefore it can indeed be called prophetic analysis.

23. Prophetic analysis, amongst others, exposes the causes of the worldwide food crisis, the water crisis and the ecological crisis as shown in the chapters dealing with these particular issues.

24. Continuous careful prophetic analysis of international financial developments can forecast meltdowns, and can therefore sound alarms pro-actively. Such analysis spells out the potential impact of a meltdown. And it offers suggestions for the effective remedy and restitution of these painful global developments.

PROPHETIC POLICY-MAKING

25. Our prophetic task lastly entails that we participate in policymaking processes on local, regional and global levels. To impact on public life and to affect the course of events, churches need to participate in policy discourse. Policy discourse is conducted by people who have the responsibility to make choices and to carry out the actions that are required by those choices. Visionaries, critics, storytellers, technical analysts can all function with the external perspective of an observer, but policymakers function with the internal perspective of persons and agents who are responsible to make choices in quite complex and specific circumstances that constrain their possible actions. Policy is to be developed in particular conditions that both limit and enable the possibilities of action. Ethical vision and commitment should give direction to policy but more is required for final decisions and policies: estimates and assessments of what is possible with the help of sociological, economic and other inputs; information on how to move practices and institutions with efficiency from where they currently are to where they could be and ought to be within a specific time frame. In policymaking the variety of vulnerable people need to be given priority, amongst others, children, women, oppressed racial groups, poor people and exploited workers. This notion of the priority of the most
vulnerable will help avoid compromises which are usually associated with policy discourse and will ensure that there is no negative impact on the most vulnerable.

26. To assist policymaking, churches cannot be satisfied with broad visionary statements, neither can we just offer criticism, nor is it enough to offer storytelling. It is also clear that we need to go beyond mere technical analysis. There is a clear need to participate in policymaking processes to impact change. This participation does not imply that we offer blueprints for policymaking. Between detailed blueprints and broad visionary statements we generate a position that is derived from prophetic vision, prophetic criticism, prophetic storytelling and prophetic analysis. It must be pointed out that too often our standing policy decisions are drafted but the monitoring of their implementation is left outside the control of civil society and the churches are especially not allowed to make any contribution to the implementation process. One of the best examples is that there are great laws and policies on paper available in the US but under American exceptionalism these were compromised in places like Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. It is therefore imperative for the churches to not only make policy pronouncements but also ensure that the implementation and impact of these policies is carefully monitored.

27. Such prophetic policymaking, for example, is described very well in the chapter on financial markets and sustainable economics. What is needed here is the close monitoring from churches and civil society to ensure their implementation.

28. The challenges in a globalising world are indeed overwhelming. Prophets act in faith. We act in faith that says no to fear and anxiety. We act in the faith of Elisha with his open prophetic eyes which did not only see the visible threats but also the invisible God with his heavenly army, horses and chariots. And like Elisha we pray: Lord open our eyes so that we can see the invisible. Open our eyes so that we can see that there are more with us than there are with them (2 Kings 6:16 and 17).

29. We act with hope that says no to melancholy and despair, inertia and apathy. We act with hope that says yes to the future, hope that lives from the promises of God, realistic hope, hope in action.

30. And the prophetic church acts in love. We act in the love that says no to the objectification and thing-ification, the oppression and subjugation of God’s people; the love that says no to the violation of human dignity and the denial of human rights; the love that says no to alienation and exclusion, injustice and violence. We act in love that seeks for every human being, for every creature, for all of existence the life in abundance, the life of the highest quality, the life of dignity and justice, the life for which God became human in Jesus Christ, the life for which Jesus lived and died and rose from the dead and ascended to the throne in heaven, the life that is fulfilled and actualised through the work of the Spirit in individuals, church and society!
WE ACT WITH HOPE THAT SAYS NO TO MELANCHOLY AND DESPAIR, INERTIA AND APATHY
Dreaming a different world together
A Joint Declaration of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Evangelical Reformed Church, Germany

Together, from North and South, discerning the signs of our times, we hear the cries of your people and see the wounds of your creation.

We are shocked by stories of injustice worldwide and disturbed by accounts of ecological destruction. We are moved by experiences of oppression, violence and being violated; experiences of exclusion and marginalization, often of minorities; experiences of human trafficking and modern-day slavery; experiences of vulnerability and neglect, lack of education, employment, protection, health, dignity, more often than not the experiences of women and children. We listen to warnings of climate change, prophesies of local disasters, dangers to air and sea; we hear accounts of coral reefs that are lost and deserts that grow, of the atmosphere that is polluted and snow that disappears. We are told of threats to the future of our children and our children’s children. We receive reports about lack of clean water and abuse of natural resources. We read studies about unfair trade and out-of-control finance and deepening poverty that disturb us. We learn about statistics describing our time and our realities and they shame us.

Behind much of these, we observe in our world a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power into a spirit of domination that seems to lord it over all and everything. We experience this presence in a pervasive spirit of destructive self-interest, even greed – the worship of money, goods and possessions; in a spirit that lacks compassionate justice and shows contemptuous disregard for the household of life and the gifts of creation. We recognize this spirit of our time in an all-encompassing way of life that serves, protects and defends the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged people, while willing to sacrifice humanity and creation. We even hear proclaimed today a gospel of consumerism, supported by powerful propaganda and believed and followed by many, religiously spreading and justifying this spirit of our time. We sense the seductive power of idolatry, the danger of losing our soul.

Therefore we lament – with the cries of your afflicted people and the wounds of your suffering creation.

Together, from North and South, we are comforted by the gospel, by the common faith we share and the common tradition in which we stand, by your Word and Spirit.

We are comforted by the knowledge that our world belongs to God; by the assurances that we do not belong to ourselves; by the promises that Jesus Christ is Lord – and we proclaim these convictions as central to our faith and tradition.

We remember the voices of our mothers and fathers, denying that there could be areas of our life in which we do not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him. We recall their witness when faced with the realities and the spirit of their times, with the lordless powers and ideologies of their day, with the challenges and temptations of their moments in history.

We confess with them that God has revealed Godself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace on earth; that in a world full of injustice and enmity, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that God calls the church to follow God in this; that God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that God frees the prisoners and restores sight to the blind; that God supports the downtrodden, protects the strangers, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for God, pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering; that God wishes to teach the people of God to do what is good and to seek the right.

With them we are convinced that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream; that the church, belonging to God, should stand where God stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Together, we are inspired by these convictions in our broken world today; together, we resist the ideology that there is no alternative and together, we reject the spirit of idolatry with its disdain for the household of life and the gifts of creation.

Together, from North and South, we heed the call of your Word and Spirit, the claim of this gospel on us, today.

We declare that Jesus Christ is God’s assurance of forgiveness and God’s mighty claim upon our whole life; that through Him, we receive joyful deliverance from the godless powers of this world for free and grateful service to God’s creatures in our common world, today.
We remember together the instruction of your law, teaching us to seek justice, compassion and truth; the voices of your prophets, warning us to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God; the visions of your worship and praise, inspiring us to long for the day when justice and peace embrace; the many accounts of salvation, exodus, liberation from bondage, filled with promises of your saving presence — we remember this even today.

We continue to believe that since we are not our own our whole life should be spent in the cultivation of righteousness, also in our common world, today.

We feel inspired by those voices who taught us that true piety and love of righteousness belong together; that worship and justice cannot be separated; that God is truly known where humanity flourishes; that we recognize as if in a mirror both your image and our own flesh in the poor, the despised and the furthest strangers in the world. We believe that all this remains true in our deeply divided and unjust world, today.

We recall those teachers who professed your creation to be the theatre of your glory, moving us to contemplation and wonder, to gratitude and respect, to stewardship, vocation and responsibility — also in our threatened world, today.

We remain mindful that together we live in communion — as members of Christ and partakers of his gifts, and thus members of one another, bound to employ our gifts readily and cheerfully for the well-being of the other.

We still acknowledge that being baptized in your name and into your body, we are called to your ministry of priest, king and prophet — as priests to receive and proclaim your justification and to share in your service, your care, your compassion and your intercession for the world; as kings to share in your struggle against the powers, your sanctification of the world and your victory over all forms of sin and destruction; as prophets to publicly proclaim your truth, your truth of reconciliation and justice, your truth that sets people free.

Together, we are moved by these memories and this claim on our life.

From South and North, together in communion, we dream a different world.

Being claimed by you, we long together for your reign of justice and peace, for your presence and your salvation — for freedom from these disturbing realities, these harsh inequalities, this cultural domination, this abysmal disparity, this injustice, this destruction; we dream of your promises of shalom. We cry and plead; we sigh and pray together for our broken and threatened world.

Praying, we commit ourselves together to care for your creatures and your creation; to work with all who seek for alternative ways — those with insight and knowledge, those with special gifts and opportunities, those in positions of leadership and responsibility; not to seek for simple answers; not to close our ears to the stories of those who are afflicted; not to close our minds to the knowledge of those in science and research; not to close our eyes to the realities all around us, both near and far; not to close our fists in selfish greed; not to close our hearts when we encounter the suffering and the wounds; not to close our hands in abdication of what is in our power to do in order to make a difference — treasuring energy, protecting biodiversity, resisting desertification, saving water, preventing pollution, respecting your work, marvelling in your creation, celebrating the wonderful web of life, your rich and abundant household of belonging.

Committing ourselves, we covenant to believe, to love, to hope together; to find new ways of being obedient, new ways of creating communities of life and witness in our shared world; to talk and learn together; to search and seek solutions together; to raise our own awareness; to see with new eyes; to turn and to change; to mitigate causes and adapt to new life-styles; to live in solidarity with victims; to speak for those without voice; to remember those easily forgotten. To heed the call to prophetic action, to struggle and strive, to face and expose, to challenge and critique, to analyze and plan, to reframe and refuse. To cultivate and nurture a spirituality of resistance and a lifestyle of discipleship — as witnesses to your compassionate justice, dreaming a different world.
FROM SOUTH AND NORTH,
TOGETHER IN COMMUNION,
WE DREAM
A DIFFERENT WORLD
The Globalisation Project Task Teams

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