

Faith Communities' Commitment Facing Globalization

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Introduction:

The present situation is one of the most complex, dangerous and uncertain lived by humanity; the unilateralism in the foreign policy of the United States, the difficult role of the United Nations, and the return to a negative agenda in which national security issues are at the center displace the central economic issues that characterized the 90s, whereupon a new scenario for international relationships was conformed that could be described as a situation of dominance rather than a situation of hegemony.

We, as churches are now seriously challenged by today's geo-political trends that point towards the aspirations of certain countries to build empires. They are characterized by "the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military powers that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests."¹

Where is our sense of justice and our pursuit for life in all its fullness when many are in despair and have lost the hope that something can change, or that they themselves can become agents of transformation for another world?

How can we be true to our calling as Christians when the household of God is under threat? Can we continue to be numb and powerless when we are faced with the massive misuse of maldistributed economic and political power and the arrogant use of military force?

A significant observation is captured in "the diffusion of violence as a lifestyle, as the culmination of patriarchal projects that have turned the risk of death into a paradigmatic human act, instead of the reproduction of our species."²

A-Recognition: Fundamental Problems

1- Life is as Stake.

In our journey with our member churches and ecumenical partners, as well as with the global civil movements, we have found many negative aspects pertaining to economic globalization.

"There are times when we look around us and we can't believe what we see; is it really we ourselves who are doing this? But then, we remain in a daze... Because of this, our presentation is dedicated to reflecting about life from the angle that gives us our Christian Faith. This tack is more urgent today than ever, since we are increasingly conscious of the deterioration of life in all forms."³

¹ World Alliance of Reformed Churches, *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*, 2004 – The Accra Confession.

² Vandana Shiva: *Mujeres, Ecología y Desarrollo*; en *Teología y Género. Selección de Textos*, Editorial Caminos, La Habana, 2003, pág 468.

³ Pablo Andinach, *In Defence of Life*, Paper present at the Protestant Mission Based, Switzerland, page 9.

This consciousness acquires unimaginable dimensions when we begin to combine information from the field of human rights, the exploitation of the environment, the expulsion of people from the economic system, domestic violence, racial hatred and discrimination, and child prostitution.

“When all of this is put on the same table, it gives the sensation that we are living in a moment when almost every aspect of reality is rift with conflict expressed as a distinct form of individual or collective violence. If we had to identify a common denominator in all of this, we could call it disdain for the life of the other. The other – our neighbour, as referred to in the Scriptures – is sociologically ignored, or economic excluded, or biologically discriminated, or sexually subjugated. The other is discounted from chronologies, or to put it plainly: the other simply does not exist for the record.

Today we see a convergence of geopolitical hegemonic domination, militarism and economic globalization which drives the whole global society into a scary and insecure situation in the name of the war on terror.”⁴

Economy is basically an access to livelihood. Under the current system many people are denied access to their livelihood. The Lives of both human beings and the earth are seriously at stake. If the current economic trends continue, the lives within human community and the planet itself will fall into a serious crisis.

2- Community as stake

The modern market and globalization undermines community. Neo-liberal globalization, based on absolutization of individual freedom and private property, has a different vision than the vision of the “oikoumene”. Oikoumene is a verbal form of the Greek oikos (house). Note that “house” is not just a building, but includes those who live in it: *It is the people who define a house*. The house is directly related to the “earth” and the whole natural order, as it is mentioned in Psalm 24. It is the household of God.

The World Council of Churches Assembly in 1998 in Harare, Africa, discerned that “the vision behind globalization competes with the vision of the Christmas Commitment to Oikoumene,” and stated that “the logic of globalization should be challenged by an alternative way of life in community in diversity”.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches noted that “neo-liberal economic globalization is exclusionary by nature” and this cannot be accepted by the Christian Faith.”

3- Our Salvation is as Stake

Today, the global economy has been sacralized, and elevated to an imperial throne. It has become the creator of human beings. In so doing, it usurps the sovereignty of God claiming a freedom that belongs to God.

⁴ Ibid, Pablo Andinach, page 9.

Luther promoted the freedom to serve the neighbours in love, not freedom to seek one's own interest. Whatever you have which is not needed for your life already belongs to the poor. The Church where the poor is excluded is not the Church.

4- Economy should be designed to serve Life, Community and Salvation for all.

The Chinese concept of economy is "KYUNG SEI JEI MIN." From which "KYUNG JEI" (economy) means "to save people by regulating the world." Enabling the life of people is the Asian concept of economy.

I learned from Dr. Park Seong – Won, from South Korea, the concept of water as an image of economy in the service of life.

He affirms that the economy should be like the flow of water. Water never flows up from the low level to the high. It always flows from the high level down to the low level.

Water permeates every corner of space, even into many hidden spaces at the lowest level...

In such a way, water provides a substantial element of life. One of the obvious illustrations of this phenomenon can be found in the relationship between the tree and water. The top should not contain all of the water, but it should let the water flow to the roots. In such a way, not only does the whole tree become healthy, but the top flourishes to a greater extent. In neo-liberal economy, unfortunately, the flow of wealth is from the poor to the rich.

A) Theological Understanding: God's economy

Economic ethics must be built on the basis of love and grace and needs to guide people not to serve MAMMON but to serve God, who is a life giver.

A theology of economy can be summarized in the following affirmations:

- Material goods and money are instruments of God's Grace. God has provided material goods for life.
- Money could become MAMMON unless it is under God's control.
- Human economic activity needs regulation, because of the depravity within human nature.
- Economy should be life enhancing, leading to a life-centered economy.
- Theology must promote a "Solidarity Economy" between the have and the have-nots.
- Reformed theology advocates "the poor-friendly economy".
- Grace and love should be the spiritual basis of economic activity.

Nevertheless, if we evaluate the current neo-liberal economy, we find that its visions are exactly the opposite to God's economy...

- While God's economy is inclusive, the neo-liberal economy is exclusive.
- While God's economy is a protective economy for the poor, the neo-liberal economy is an exploitative economy for the poor.

- While in God's economy, the wealth flows from the rich to the poor, in the neo-liberal economy, it flows from the poor to the rich.
- While the economic index of God's economy is the poor, the neo-liberal economy index is the rich.
- While God's economy is based on God's love and grace, the neo-liberal economy is economy based on limitless competition.

The vision of an economy of a caring God, the prophetic critique, the social and legal regulation of the economy and the resistance against injustice are various forms of the basic biblical view that considers that economy's mandate is the fullness of life for all people and communities. The current global economic power does not aim for the preservation of life, the restoration of human dignity, the building of ethics rooted in the common good or the stewardship of creation. There is a fundamental theological conflict with neo-liberal ideology.

B) Covenanting Process: Working Together for Justice and Truth.

One important notion in talking about covenant is that of the establishment of a divine covenant for the sake of the poorest situation of the partner. God's covenant with Noah, his descendents and every living creature was made when the whole creation was completely devastated by flood.

God's covenant with Abraham was made when Abraham was in a hopeless situation in terms of the descents after him. This further meant that he was in a landless situation, at the time rendering him economically hopeless...

Jesus' covenant was made when we were hopeless in terms of our salvation.

Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth should be made, not because of those that are okay, but because of the poor members of the Body of Christ who are in hopeless situations.

Covenanting is a word meaning binding together for the truth and entering into an alternative vision.

A comparison between the language of "Covenant" and current neo-liberal language helps us to understand the deeply rooted difference among them.

- Covenant vs. Contract
- Covenant vs. Competition
- Covenant vs. Privatization
- Covenant vs. Untouchable Freedom of the individual.

Theologically speaking Covenant is an ecclesial form of solidarity. In the book, "The Covenant self", Walter Brueggemann emphasized "othering" as an important concept in covenant relationship. In covenant we other ourselves into God, in covenant with God and with the whole Creation. All members of Creation should other themselves into the others.

C) Ecumenical Journey: Searching Transformative Justice and Solidarity

How do we live our faith in the context of globalization? Responding to this question raised by delegates of the Harare WCC Assembly in Africa in 1998, attending churches embarked on an ecumenical journey, as part of the wider ecumenical family of world communions and regional ecumenical organizations specialised in responding to the question.

As a result of this process we have:

- The Accra Declaration of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches that was approved in their General Council in Accra Ghana, August 2004 “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth”.
- The Lutheran World Federation Assembly affirmed a document entitled: “A call to participate in transforming economic globalization” in which delegates committed themselves to work on world economic globalization. The meeting was in Winnipeg, Canada, July 2003 and the document was based on their self-understanding of being a communion of churches.
- The Pacific Conference of Churches organized a global conference on economic globalization called: “The Island of Hope” (August 2001).
- Central and Eastern Europe met in Budapest in June 2001. Their message to the world was: “Serve God and not Mammon”. Their message not only addressed the churches in Eastern and Central Europe, but also the churches in the West and the South.
- Churches in Western Europe met in June 2002 in the Netherlands under the theme: “Economy in the service of life.” They affirmed that nobody is excluded from God’s household of life.
- Latin American Churches met in Buenos Aires in 2003. The Protestant Churches affirmed in their final document that “ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. We have reached our limit; we have had enough of such injustices.”
- The call by the Caribbean Churches focused on “the need to globalize the fullness of life.”
- North America Churches met in January 2004 in New York under the theme “What does God require of us?” Coming out of the meeting, a declaration for just trade in the service of an economy of life was approved.
- Women’s voices on Alternative Globalization addressing people and earth met in the Philippines in August 2004. The consultation drafted a “Call to transformative reflection and action”.
- A call for AGAPE (Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth) was written by 35 participants from different countries. This document will be approved in the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil next year February 2006.

D) A call to be Transformative Communities

- We are called to be nonconforming and transformative communities, because life is not possible unless we do transformation that addresses the roots of injustice. We are called to let ourselves be transformed by the renewing of our minds from the dominating and egoistic imperial mindset, thus doing the will of God which is fulfilled in love (AGAPE), solidarity (Romans 13:10) and grace (Isa. 55). Transformative communities are transformed by God’s living grace and the practice of economy of solidarity and sharing. We as churches are called

to create spaces for, and become agents of, transformation, even as we are entangled in and complicit with the very system we are called to change.

- The AGAPE challenge is clearly reminding us to put people and the earth at the center of any economy so that it may serve the life of all creatures.

- In order to restore the vision of AGAPE economy in the context of neo-liberal economic globalization, churches as transformative communities are called to make a clear decision of faith commitment in word and deed. Different ways to express the faithfulness of the churches according to their traditions are, among others:

- Opting for costly discipleship, churches are prepared to become martyrs in following Jesus;
- Taking a faith stance when the powers of injustice and destruction question the very integrity of the Gospel; churches can confess their faith by saying “NO” to the power and principalities.
- Participating in the communion (Koinonia) of the Triune God for fullness of life.
- Sharing the suffering and pain of people and the Earth in company with the Spirit, who is groaning with the whole creation (Romans 8: 22 – 23)
- Covenanting for justice in life together with peoples and other creatures of God.
- Being in solidarity with the suffering people and the Earth and in resistance against powers of injustice and destruction.
- In order to be transformative, we ask God’s grace and guidance and offer our prayers with all our hearts and minds.

Prayer

God, you have called us

To be nonconforming and transformative communities. You called us to let ourselves be transformed by the renewing of our minds. You have called us to practice an AGAPE economy of solidarity and sharing. You have called us to be where you are, with the suffering people and the groaning creation in solidarity with those who are building communities of life.

God in your grace, help us to obey your call to be agents of transformation.

Be not conformed to the structures of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. (ROMANS 12:1-2)