

Globalization and Christian Hope

Economy in the Service of Life

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CITIZENS *for* PUBLIC JUSTICE



Contents

Foreword

What kind of world are we heading towards?

Introduction

How this paper began

A first glance at globalization

What is globalization?

What is money, and what does it do?

The consequences for wealthy nations

The consequences for poor nations

What do globalization, church and faith have to do with each other?

The call to solidarity and frugality

The enduring task of government

Biblical themes and reflections

What can be done?

A tree economy, not a tunnel economy

The international structural approach needed

What will help? Can ordinary people contribute something?

Appendix I: Dialogue between churches of the South and the North

Letter to the Churches of the North

Letter of the Churches of Argentina to the Churches in the North

Economy in the Service of Life: Response from the Soesterberg Consultation

Appendix II

Organizing on globalization

Note on *Globalization and Christian Hope*

Note on the Citizens for Public Justice

Foreword

When asked why someone should study economics, Joan Robinson, a student of John Maynard Keynes and one of the noted economists of the last century, is reported to have said, “So you can tell when economists are not telling the truth!” As an economist, Bob Goudzwaard is a “truth-teller” of a public sort. In this paper he and Leo Andringa tackle one of the most pressing issues of our times: how can Christians respond to the profound effects of globalization?

“Globalization” was a buzzword of the early 1980s. People knew that the world was changing. Technological changes introduced the Internet and other rapid modes of communication. These changes in turn changed the nature of economic life, enabling stock markets to function virtually twenty-four hours a day. There were political changes as well. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War meant that economic markets played an ever greater — and unrestrained — role in people’s lives.

Initially, globalization was a description of the way the world was becoming more integrated and interdependent. Over time its role changed from a “description” of the way the world was, to a “prescription” of the way the world should be. By the end of the 1980s, people were being told, “There Is No Alternative.” The Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement and the creation of the European Community that began to harmonize economies were but one set of symptoms of this trend. Another was the growing struggles of poorer countries to accommodate imposed “structural adjustment programs” to address their massive debts, debts resulting largely from the failed advice of economists from affluent nations or from wasteful spending by dictators propped up by Western governments.

This prescriptive imposition of economic globalization was not merely a twist of fate. Governments made choices about what economic policies to pursue. Increasing trade, reducing regulation, the freer movement of capital, the privatization of public goods and services, and other policies were deliberate choices, although cast in the veneer that somehow these were the inevitable laws of nature, not to be altered. While many saw through this charade, it was difficult for legitimate questions to be raised without deferring to the false god of globalization. It was even more difficult to credibly propose alternatives to what had now become the dominant economic ideology — a dogmatic theology of sorts.

But out on the edges, churches and others were raising questions. The consequences — both intended and unintended — were becoming clearer. As the claims of globalization were more becoming more ultimate and rigid, people, communities and nations were not only being impacted, but reconfigured, disempowered, and often sacrificed on the economic altars of globalization. Economic globalization was failing to safeguard human and ecological well being. The relentless pursuit and application of these economic policies was creating a spiritual crisis of oppression, poverty and hopelessness for millions. For the churches, the requirements of social and ecological justice were being ignored and the demands of economic globalization were dangerously close to idolatrous. The dominance of economic globalization posed a serious theological challenge to people of faith who understood economic life to be in service to God and neighbour.

This paper is important because it offers a Gospel approach to economics which does not treat economics as its own gospel, to be accepted unquestioningly. Through a prophetic inquiry, Bob Goudzwaard, as a Christian economist, and Leo Andringa, as a retired Christian banker, offer a place where the Gospel ethically engages the economics of globalization. For Christians, it is a reminder of our ultimate fidelity to God, not markets, and of what justice requires of us as we respond to the love God has shown to us in Jesus Christ. Christian faith offers a different perspective on the world. For economists, it is also a challenge to recall the more noble vocation of the discipline of economics itself: to make life better and more sustainable for human communities and creation. In short, our values matter. Economic choices are never value neutral. Bob Goudzwaard and Leo Andringa bridge this artificial divide between faith and economics.

This paper is also important as part of a larger confessional conversation that is taking place within the Christian family globally. The World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation have all begun international conversations among churches around the world. Formal consultations have been held in Bangkok, the Fiji Islands, Prague, and most recently in Soesterberg, The Netherlands. They are posing a critical question: are the claims of economic globalization in conflict with the Gospel?

These discussions represent a contrasting experience of globalization. Unlike those forums where self-interest is a dominant dynamic, discussions among the faithful begin with what is held in common and how human solidarity unites rather than divides. This paper was born of these ongoing discussions in a global faith community that transcends boundaries and categories. It

represents not merely a critique of globalization, but also symbolizes the initial steps along an alternative path.

As authorities in the world of economics, Bob Goudzwaard and Leo Andringa peel away the obfuscations of economics and tell us the truth about economic possibilities. As Christians, Goudzwaard and Andringa remind us of how the values we share mean we are not merely objects of the economic globalization of despair, but rather subjects with God working, choosing, and struggling in solidarity with others to realize a globalization of hope.

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What kind of world are we heading towards?

Introduction

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many people thought that peace had arrived permanently. But since then, we have been alarmed by tragic events in countries like Bosnia and Rwanda. September 11, 2001, is engraved in our memories as a day when evil struck in a terrifying manner. More than ever, we have the sense that we live in an uncertain world.

Supporting that sense is the feeling that so many political and economic situations seem to be out of our own control. Political decisions made in the United States influence our lives much more than decisions made in Ottawa. In our daily work, many of us experience a sense of powerlessness. Sometimes we simply have no choice but to live with decisions made by people far away, because the company we work for is a subsidiary of a multinational corporation. We are more dependent on the “global economy” than ever before. And as part of that global economy, every day enormous streams of capital dart back and forth across the globe — capital flows that are capable of destabilizing entire economies, such as those of Argentina and Indonesia, in short periods of time.

These realities are related to what is known as “globalization.” Whether we like it or not, we have become incorporated into a global political and economic whole.

All of this raises questions touching the fundamentals of our lives. If so much is decided outside of us, then what happens to the notion of personal responsibility? *Globalization* — the word itself can make us feel very small. As Christians, we profess faith, hope and trust in God. But is it possible to continue to walk in that profession in a time of globalization?

Making the questions more difficult is the fact that the advantages and disadvantages of globalization are distributed across the world in such a lopsided fashion. The advantages — economic growth, international contacts, the Internet — merely enhance the social and economic head start that the rich already have over the poor of the world. Sadly, the story of globalization therefore also includes the story of streams of refugees, not to mention further assaults on the environment.

What has become of Jesus' words in the book of John (John 10:10): "I have come so that they may have life, and have it to the full"? How do we account for the fact that so little of his appeal resonates in the global economy?

Ought churches and individual Christians to delve into such complex issues? The answer may be surprising. When it comes to globalization, neither political life nor business life holds the earliest credentials. They belong to the church instead. The apostles traveled across all of what was then the known world — the *oikoumene* — to proclaim the Gospel. They did so in the knowledge that the whole earth is God's domain. "For *yours* is the kingdom", they prayed. Even the most remote areas reached by the process of globalization fall under the promise of God's kingdom. They therefore deserve our love and care. God's call to do justice holds for the whole world.

That faith can encourage us. It can prevent us, for example, from seeing globalization only as a dead-end. For the Lord who first called the world into being also stands at the world's horizon. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last letter of the alphabet of world history. God not only created the world, he also actively sustains it. It is for that reason that we have asked people to test the developments occurring in the process of globalization with the requirements of the Gospel.

How this paper began

In 1999, during the so-called Asian Crisis, a symposium was held by Asian churches in Bangkok to discuss the effects of globalization on the poor in Asia.¹ These churches drafted an impressive *Letter to the Churches of the North*, in which they asked Western Christians whether they are still familiar enough with "the richness of sufficiency," that is, the "wealth" that comes from knowing that we have enough or have reached a saturation point.² In 2001, churches in the Pacific Islands held an ecumenical conference entitled "Islands of Hope." At the same time, the churches of middle and Eastern Europe met in Budapest. Their chief message was that all churches and societies are again confronted with the choice of whom they wish to serve: God or Mammon (the god of money). Their message parallels the appeal made by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1997 in Decreczen, an appeal which the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare later strongly endorsed, namely "that all churches around the world must begin to reflect on the meaning of the Christian confession in this time of increasing injustice and uninterrupted environmental destruction."

In fact, almost all church communities are busy with the issue of globalization. It is striking how related all of these efforts are. For example, in the “Jubilee Year” of 2000, Pope John Paul II issued an appeal to finally grant the poor man Lazarus a full-fledged place at the table of the rich. The Pope’s powerful call for a “globalization of solidarity” has since traveled around the world. Similarly, the Lutheran World Federation does not tire of linking the motif of the *communio* (the community expressed most strongly in the Eucharist) with the question of worldwide social justice.

In June 2002 representatives from various churches in western Europe met in Soesterberg, The Netherlands. One of the major goals of their consultation, entitled “Economy in the Service of Life”, was to develop a response to serious questions raised by churches in the South about the process of globalization and the role of Christians in the North in that process. An earlier version of this paper was one of the resource documents for that consultation and it has since been distributed widely among Dutch Christians.

However, more people need to take this ecumenical journey. It is crucial that all Christians participate. To assist in that process, this paper attempts, in as simple a manner as possible, to describe how the world of capital affects all of us as citizens. It also suggests how we, inspired by our faith in Christ as the Lord of the world, can respond.

A first glance at globalization

What is Globalization?

The word “globalization” is relatively new. It suggests little more, but also little less, than that a global society has come into being. Although that process has been happening for a long time, it has accelerated rapidly in more recent years. Today people are much more aware of it than they were before.

That globalization is not new is most apparent in the economy. For decades, an item like a refrigerator has shown the marks of global inter-relationships. A refrigerator may have been assembled in South Korea with iron from Sweden, aluminum from Jamaica and copper from Chile. It was likely manufactured in Spain, using nuclear energy from France with uranium mined

in South Africa.

Today, however, new developments in transportation and communication technologies have strengthened global inter-relationships, while political decisions have further paved the way for the development of global markets. We therefore live in a global economy, and no government today can prevent its citizens from becoming dependent on the powerful forces propelling it.

Politicians seem to have faith in this global economy. But many other people do not. Demonstrators protest in the streets. They do not put faith in something abstract like the “global market.” They fight against their increasing sense of impotence. They see that the power of national governments is steadily eroding in the face of the rising power of money around the world. Indeed, it seems that never before has money held such attraction and power.

What is money, and what does it do?

People earn money with their labour. With that money, they provide for their daily needs and desires. The money that people spend is received by companies and then spent on wages and the purchase of raw materials. A portion of the wages earned is deposited in the bank. Banks then loan money to families who, for example, take out a mortgage to buy their own house.

Money therefore makes possible an exchange of goods and services. Some have pictured the relationship between goods and services and money as a two-sided coin: one side represents the goods and services paid for, while the other side expresses their monetary value. The government must ensure that there is approximately as much money in circulation as is needed for the exchange of goods and the payment for services.

This simple cycle of money and goods becomes somewhat more complicated when people from various countries exchange goods with each other. The Canadian importer who buys tomatoes from Mexico must have money in Mexican currency in order to pay the supplier. Previously, the central bank was closely involved with access to foreign money. That has now completely changed. International trade in money and capital (that is, money that is used for loans) is now unregulated. One can buy foreign currency at a variety of institutions, including the bank on the corner, without any participation by the central bank. Due to the free exchange of currencies, international trade in goods and services has become much easier and has therefore increased. In fact, in the past twenty years, the volume of world trade has quadrupled. The number of linkages between those who make or harvest the product and the end user has also increased. Indeed, a whole global network of economic alliances and financial relationships has arisen. The economies

of the world are, as it were, chained to each other. In general, governments try to ensure that the international exchange of goods, services and mutual payments is done correctly. But with the increased interdependence comes conflict, such as when oil supplies dry up.

One would expect that, along with the growth of international trade in goods and services, a corresponding growth in the international trade in money and capital would also have occurred. But surprisingly, that has not at all been the case. On the contrary, over the past twenty years, international trade in money has increased not four times, but *one hundred* times!

Why is that, and what are the consequences?

If a dealer in Europe expects a shipload of wheat from America every month, then every month he or she must have enough U.S. dollars to pay the supplier. If the dealer does not want to risk the possibility that the U.S. dollar will be more expensive than it is now (in other words, that he will have to pay more euros for the same amount of dollars), then the dealer would do better to buy the U.S. dollars now at today's price. The dealer transfers to the bank the risk of loss (or gain) in the exchange. The bank therefore fulfills an important bridge function and fosters trade between countries. The bank makes money by buying and selling foreign currencies.

More recently, however, banks have also done something else. Through the development of communications technology, banks can profit from the differences in exchange which exist in different places around the world for the same currency. With the touch of a keyboard, an order can be given to buy money in Singapore and to sell money in Mexico. Billions of euros, dollars, yen and other units of currency flip from one side of the world to the other instantly each day. People also think up and try out more and more financial instruments in the trade of both stocks and goods, such as stock options, swaps, futures and other so-called derivatives. What all of these "bank products" have in common is that they profit from the distribution of financial risks across various times and places.

In this way, money is turned over without a corresponding production of goods. It is like inflating a large balloon. The turnover does not add any social value; it does not result in more bread being baked, more bikes being made or more houses being built (see box, Money creation without social production, on next page).

Banks hire talented young people to sit behind a computer screen all day, watching for places around the world where currency deserves attention. Sometimes the process is so complicated that even accounting firms have difficulty following it. In Singapore, for example, one of the currency speculators at the British Baring's Bank drove the entire company into ruin. He took great risks and then attempted to restore the bank's position through even greater risks. As a

result, the bank not only suffered a multi-billion dollar loss; it fell into disrepute and bankruptcy.

These developments in international currency speculation have gradually led to the remarkable situation that the volume of international trade in money and money products is now, as mentioned, *one hundred times* greater than the total volume of international trade in goods and services. Money is therefore not merely the flip side of the goods and services coin. *It has become an independent good or product in its own right.* Trade in currency-derived “products” is becoming more and more independent from trade in goods.

Money has therefore acquired a different role. If earlier money was primarily a medium of exchange representing the value of goods and services provided, today money is primarily a

Money creation without social production

Consider an example of how money creation has increased without social production. A number of years ago banks began to provide mortgages to couples on the basis of the incomes of both partners. As a result, the borrowing capacity of a couple substantially increased. The house of one’s dreams was finally affordable! But if the number of houses available remains the same, and if more and more people can afford to buy the same house, then the price of that house will rise. That is in fact what happened. In the last ten years, house prices have more than doubled. In order to buy a house today, the buyer needs to borrow twice as much money as before. Often that means that both

partners must work in order to pay off the principal and interest on the mortgage.

But there is more. Because the value of the house has increased, the owner has suddenly become wealthy. He or she is approached by the bank to take out a mortgage on the “added value” of the house. More money therefore changes hands without additional production. The bank then uses this money to buy shares or something similar. In other words, the bank becomes wealthier without having done anything. If the balloon pops (the house drops in value or stocks tumble), then those who have borrowed the money are the losers. If someone defaults on a loan, the bank simply transfers responsibility to a collection agency.

commodity from which one can make a large profit. For banks, trade in this commodity has now become their most important source of income. But the production of goods and services has not increased accordingly.

The consequences for wealthy nations

The free exchange of international currencies unquestionably has positive sides. Sometimes, for example, with the support of “big money”, important initiatives can occur that would not succeed without the assistance of large donors.

But there is cause for concern. There is an essential difference between a society in which money *serves* people and a society in which money *controls* people. Now that trade in international currency substantially outstrips trade in goods and services, and that the international currency economy has become the artificial heart of the globalization process, harmful consequences are bound to appear. Here are four such consequences:

First, according to the new financial logic, a business is valued less and less by the value of the goods and services that it provides. Instead, its value is determined more and more by the value it has in the eyes of the suppliers of capital or shareholders (its so-called “shareholder’s value”). As a result, the objectives that the business establishes become warped. The continued existence or continuity of the business gives way to satisfying the desires of the stockholders. It is the next fiscal quarter that counts. An announcement of strong earnings and massive labour force restructuring makes a rather good impression on the stock market. Decisive managers are lured to the company with huge salary options to work on behalf of the company’s interests (that is, the stockholders’ interests) as aggressively as possible.

Secondly, the notion that money is our highest end has permeated all of society. A *money culture* has emerged. Why, for example, would one set up a factory, hire people and produce goods, if one can earn money in the stock market with far less effort? People have become infected by the craving for more, as we see in the rise of investment clubs. The more that the culture of money permeates our society, the more it affects our social fabric, a fabric based on mutual trust and solidarity. Directors of companies today must contend with an almost unsustainable tension between their business role on the one hand and their task as a reliable employer on the other hand — and even with their role at home as fathers or mothers. Family members care for each other, orienting themselves to loving, helping, sharing and giving to one another. But that culture of giving and serving does not always agree with the culture of the work situation. Yet it is precisely the culture of solidarity that is so important for the renewal of global economic relationships.

Thirdly, we notice the dominating role that money plays in the affairs of national governments. Every Western government is confronted with the question of how far to go in protecting the public sector and its system of social programs. Every politician today knows that if the government levies high taxes and social premiums on companies, then it undermines the nation's competitive position in the global economy. Government faces pressure to decrease such burdens on its business sector. That in turn jeopardizes its system of social security. Governments also try to eliminate high taxes by eliminating programs and services that cause huge losses, and by decreasing subsidies and privatizing industries. In many countries a wave of privatization has swept important public companies, such as public transportation companies and public utilities concerned with gas, water and air, under "the discipline of the market." The promise was that this would lead to better service at lower cost. But in a number of cases privatization has dealt huge blows to the stability and survival of the companies involved. Privatization often also creates problems involving the accessibility and affordability of programs and services that had been previously provided to citizens free of charge or at low cost.

Finally, all social sectors face increasing commercial pressure. The influence and power of huge international money infiltrates such sectors as sports and health care. International pharmaceutical concerns try, in a number of ways, to persuade doctors to prescribe their medicines. Companies sponsor scientific research in order to further increase the receptivity of children to TV advertising. In the United States, "crony capitalism", where politicians and economic power brokers play ball with each other, marches on. Recent examples of dishonest accounting practises involving Enron, WorldCom and other large corporations show the grim consequences of unethical corporate behaviour, with weak or non-existent government regulation to protect the public interest.

The consequences for poor nations

The more important question is how today's process of globalization affects poor countries. For some, globalization brings increased prosperity, especially for countries which have large amounts of natural resources available for export. Unfortunately, however, a close relationship exists between the process of globalization and rising impoverishment in large parts of the world, such as in Africa. That has occurred for two reasons. The first is exclusion; the global economy systematically prevents the interests of the poor countries from receiving adequate recognition. The second is rising debt levels; debts can increase even when a poor country is doing its utmost,

economically speaking, to pay them off.

◆ *Exclusion*

At the end of the Second World War, in the American town of Bretton Woods, the wealthy countries established new rules for the international currency economy. The rich countries wanted to prevent a dramatic economic crisis from happening again, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s, when millions of people were reduced to begging. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was created to assist countries that might run into temporary payment problems, and the World Bank was erected in order to supply sufficient capital to the poor countries. Yet in subsequent years gaping holes have appeared in these plans. A healthy world trade organization was lacking. And decision-makers paid too little attention to the reality that the rich countries look after their own interests first.

The consequences of their self-interest appeared quickly. To guarantee their own growth, the rich countries wanted prices for natural resources to remain as low as possible. But for their own development, the resource-exporting poor countries desperately needed the earnings which higher prices would have brought. The system contained nothing that would hold the wealthy nations accountable for their actions. The rich countries blocked the regulation of the natural resources market that was needed and did not look after the capital needs of the poor countries, despite a colossal increase in the international currency exchange. Their actions account for the fact that, since 1950, the wealth of the world has increased sixty-fold, while in that same period of time income in the majority of countries around the world, particularly in Africa, has decreased.

In the intervening decades, this rich-poor gap reached absurd proportions. The United Nations estimates that the 225 richest people in the world together possess an amount of wealth equivalent to the annual income of the two billion poorest people in the world. One in four inhabitants of the earth must somehow survive on less than \$1 U.S. dollar per day.

These facts cannot be divorced from existing international agreements. To this day, voting power in both the IMF and the World Bank is determined on the basis of national income. In other words, those with the most money vote. The wealthy countries, as the strongest party, are therefore able to impose their will upon the poorer countries. Impoverished, heavily-indebted countries must accept harsh terms laid down by the wealthy countries in order to receive further loans and other financial assistance.

♦ *Rising debt*

We see the direct consequences of the inadequacies of the international monetary system in the problem of Third World debt. The fact that the indebted countries — or more precisely, the leaders of these countries — have made huge mistakes in borrowing from foreign banks and other institutions is beyond dispute. Corrupt dictators have often funneled the borrowed money into private accounts held in rich countries. But it must also be said that huge mistakes have been made by the banks issuing loans to fraudulent leaders who all too readily offered the stolen money to subordinates.

In the 1970s, many developing countries followed the development model recommended to them by the developed countries. That model dictated that investment in huge infrastructure projects (such as nuclear energy facilities, flood control dams and airports) received priority. By the end of the 1970s, however, the economic tide had turned, and interest rates, including rates on old loans, went sky high. It therefore became more and more difficult for the poor countries to pay off their existing debts. In order to prevent a worldwide financial crisis, the IMF and World Bank stepped in. They offered the indebted countries new loans on the condition that they follow a policy called “structural adjustment.” That policy remains in place today, although the World Bank and IMF now avoid the term as much as possible. Structural adjustment consisted of forcing the indebted countries to expand their exports and slow down their imports. They would achieve this by, among other things, devaluing their own currency and, at the same time, curtailing their government expenditures. These measures would allow countries to, as it was said, “restore” their exports, pay off their debts, and receive new loans.

But what escaped the financiers’ attention was the fact that if the majority of poor countries adopted this export policy at the same time, then the prices of their export products would drop even further, due to oversupply. That is in fact what happened. Precisely by following the policy prescribed for them, their burden of debt became higher, not lower. And with all the cutbacks in public expenditures, governments were increasingly unable to provide for basic human needs, such as health and education. The consequences were especially dramatic for the poor in Africa. They watched as prices for imports rose while, at the same time, the prices they received for their export products plummeted. Schools and hospitals were forced to close.

It seems that little has been learned from these facts. In 1997, as a result of the Asian Crisis, hundreds of millions of people in Indonesia, Thailand and Korea again fell under the poverty line as a result of the adjustment policy imposed by the IMF to deal with the crisis. The IMF exacerbated the crisis by imposing adjustment measures which forced more companies into

bankruptcy and led to higher unemployment. The international economy and government policy, which ought to have served life, turned against people instead.

What do globalization, church and faith have to do with each other?

If anything is clear from the foregoing, it is that the process of globalization, irrespective of its benefits, has painful shadow sides. Its shadow sides almost always emanate from thoughts and actions driven by self-interest, self-enrichment or recklessness. Indeed, the economic and financially-driven process of globalization is not a neutral phenomenon. It is conceived of and shaped by people.

But churches and concerned Christians have also begun to act on a global scale. Sometimes, sensitive to injustice and the destruction of creation, they have sounded the alarm. Behind their concern lies the conviction that things need to be different. They are saying that there cannot only be one method of globalization, especially one that happens to coincide exactly with what the rich and powerful in the world want. But if that is the case, then what kind of globalization are the churches envisioning?

The call to solidarity and frugality

Consider the example of Pope John Paul II. In the document *The Church in America*, released in 1999, the Pope suggested that we must view globalization in the light of what social justice requires of us. That starting point led him to issue an appeal for a “global culture of solidarity”, for a *humanization of the globalization process*, so that the poor receive justice and local cultures are respected.

In the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II juxtaposed the underdevelopment of many places in the South with the overdevelopment of the wealthy, materialist North. He believed that the two types of development are related; the overdevelopment of the rich countries can increase the underdevelopment of the poor countries.³ In 1999 the Pope also pointed out that the enormous growth of financial markets threatens the rest of the economy. He therefore called for regulations that would save the weakest from always having to pay the highest price when a

crisis erupts. Financial activities, he asserted, “must serve the common good of the entire human family.” In an address to workers on May 1, 2000, the Pope stressed that globalization must never undermine the value and the central place of the human person. We must therefore build structures that guarantee justice and solidarity, he said. We ought to orient social systems towards what people need, and people themselves may never be sacrificed to the system.

We believe that these are statements and insights belong to the ecumenical heritage of all Christians.

In our time, the invitation to Christians and to all of society is to ensure a globalization of solidarity, a globalization of inclusion. That is a clear obligation of justice. And while the obligation rests on the shoulders of government, it is also a challenge and responsibility for all of us.⁴

By developing a concrete witness of moderation and generosity, churches and Christian organizations in North America and Europe today can become a “sign and a means” towards achieving a human globalization. Moderation involves dealing more decisively and responsibly with our consumption of goods and services. The rationale for doing so, however, is not that living a simpler and more sober life is somehow better. Rather, moderating our consumption will create the means of allowing us to open our hearts to the needs of the world through concrete acts of love. We need to adopt a different consumption practise for the sake of our neighbour who knocks on our door either today, because of globalization, or tomorrow, because of our untrammled use of creation and its natural resources.

Almost every recent church document about globalization has noted the degree to which Western culture — and as part of it, Western Christianity — is caught in the curse of materialism and consumerism. Remarkably, the dominant illusion in the wealthy nations is still that a higher level of consumption makes people happier, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. “More and more” does not make people happy. On the contrary, it leaves more and more people in isolation.

The letter to the churches from the North from participants at the Bangkok symposium on globalization (see Appendix 1) challenges our consciences on this point. It reminds us that the expectation of God’s Kingdom should direct us to toward the richness of communal sufficiency, not toward always wanting more for ourselves. As the letter says, “shouldn’t caring and sharing for and with each other be the main characteristic of our lifestyle, instead of giving in to the secular trend of a growing consumerism?”

Moreover, unrestricted material consumption in already wealthy countries puts a corresponding pressure on the natural resources still available, on energy supplies and the environment,

to such an extent that it undermines the poorer countries' ability to develop economically and thus free their citizens from poverty.

The enduring task of government

In a healthy economy, money serves life, not the other way around. In order to ensure that society is not overpowered by the world of money, and that the weak are not abandoned, churches have always believed that government has a certain correcting role to play with respect to the creation and value of money. Governments must monitor the monetary system and oversee the exchange of money in appropriate ways. But today national governments have, to a great extent, lost their grip on the monetary system, due to the globalization of the economy. Globalization now makes self-enrichment possible without any monitoring at the national or international levels.

A new, just, public regulation of the world monetary system is therefore needed more urgently than ever before. The ship of international money has gone adrift and requires a new anchoring in the norm of public justice. For that reason, many churches in the South have correctly voiced their disapproval over the laxness of governments at renewing the world monetary system. They ask us: what value do you and your governments actually place in God's promise that God will establish justice over all the earth?

Biblical themes and reflections

The Bible contains a number of impulses supporting a better regulation of the world economy. For example, possession of money is not central to the biblical definition of "economy" (in the Greek sense of *oikonomia*). Rather, *oikonomia* means good care for the household (*oikos* means "household"). The caring administration of the land, and care of all people who work the land, were therefore primary. That emphasis came to expression in the practical laws that held for ancient Israel. Every 50th year — the so-called year of Jubilee — impoverished Israelites had the right to reassume, debt-free, possession of the land they once held, land that they had lost over the course of the years, either because of their own fault or because of oppression by their countrymen.

The prophets latched onto this theme. In gripping fashion, for example, the Old Testament prophet Nehemiah described how the poor of the time — women in particular — had resisted their rich counterparts. They stated that they were of the same flesh and blood as their brothers, but that fact had made little or no difference. They had to mortgage and give their houses and

vineyards to the rich, who, when things went wrong, conscripted their daughters and sons into slavery. The poor found an audience in the prophet, who persuaded the rich to voluntarily give back to the poor what they had taken. We hear an echo of this theme later in the Song of Mary (the Magnificat), when Mary declares, “he has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:53).

The Bible also illustrates that responsible social laws can contribute to the well being of all. For example, the edges of the fields in ancient Israel could not be harvested, and the fruit left behind in the vineyards could not be picked, because that was reserved for the poor and the alien. The creditor could not enter the house of the debtor but had to wait outside. Prescriptions that protect the dignity of the poor and ensure that they enjoy an abundant life are also contained in the Koran. Millions of devout Islamic people around the world set aside 10 percent of their incomes in support of the poor.

For us today, the issue is not one of finding a way to copy the Old Testament laws. Our economy is different. In biblical times, the soil was the main source of prosperity. Today the primary sources of prosperity are the possession of capital and access to knowledge. But the directions given by Scripture indicate that we are called to shape the economy in such a way that *everyone* has access to the sources of prosperity.

W hat can be done?

A tree economy, not a tunnel economy

It is not possible to divorce the great economic issues in the world from what people hope and believe. A certain vision — a form of belief — animates even today’s reigning pattern of globalization. That is why churches and church movements must dare to confront the one-sided pattern of globalization.

What that implies is perhaps made clear by introducing two images. The first is that of a traffic tunnel, and the second is that of a fruit tree coming into bloom.

In a traffic tunnel, traffic is moving towards a destination: the light at the end of the tunnel. As drivers we know, however, that we must first go through a dark and narrow part before we arrive. And doing that successfully requires certain things. Slow cars may not enter the tunnel,

because they would hold up the other traffic too much. We have no choice but to simply accept the noise pollution. And traffic moves well only if everyone obeys the rules of the road.

The image of the tunnel reflects how people often see the economy today. Priority is given to fast traffic, that is, to the interests of the maximum economic growth possible because that's how we reach the light at the end of the tunnel as quickly as possible. When we arrive there, we will have achieved material abundance and prosperity for all people, including the poor, not to mention having the money needed for healthcare and care of the environment.

But to get there, it is argued, we must comply with the laws of the tunnel. People need to move promptly to the right lane in order to leave room for someone who wants to drive faster. Everyone must strive towards the greatest efficiency and productivity possible. Of course, the fact that there will be certain casualties because of these processes is annoying. Regrettably, certain countries will fall back further temporarily. Sometimes mass layoffs will be necessary. We will need to exclude people who are "unsuitable" for work from the production process. Nor can we avoid some environmental damage. But the people and the environment affected can receive financial compensation afterwards, thanks to higher economic growth. Growth also allows for higher social expenditures for social programs, and it provides us with more money for environmental protection and development aid.

The image of the tunnel helps us to see how arguments of this nature have often been used to defend even the most vicious forms of globalization. In our economy, we give preference to those who grow the fastest economically. We simply put up with the resulting damage to the poorest countries and to the environment. After all, the expression goes, "There Is No Alternative."

But there is a sound alternative view of economic globalization, one that can be illustrated with the image of a flowering fruit tree. It is bursting with growth, even at the outer extremes of its branches. Like a tunnel, the tree is an efficient, well-organized whole. But it is more than just a well-functioning mechanism. It is first and foremost a living organism. As such, it works continually to utilize all of its living cells in the process of growing and then producing fruit. The tree is completely attuned to its surroundings and will never exhaust the soil because of its growth. This is a "flow" principle radically different from the flow of the traffic tunnel.

We could consider the fruit of a flowering economy as satisfying the basic needs of humanity, creating employment opportunities in all countries, and caring for the environment. But then a question arises. Why would a flowering economy be able to accomplish what the great mechanistic global economy cannot? For today the tunnel in our tunnel economy seems to get only longer, while the light at its end fails to appear at all for the poorest.

The Focolare movement

The Focolare movement, which began in the Roman Catholic Church in 1943, is active in about 180 countries. Millions of Catholics and thousands of Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox Christians have found a new impetus in the Focolare movement's "Spirituality of Unity" for living lives based on the Gospel.

A non-government organization (NGO) recognized by the United Nations, the Focolare movement is actively engaged in both large and small social initiatives. A number of companies (currently 764, 478 of which are in Europe) participate in the "Economy of Communion" project. Member companies keep one third of their profits, allocate one third towards meeting the immediate needs of the poor, and earmark the final third to support the formation of people in "the culture of giving."

The companies operate within the market mechanism. But undergirding them is 60 years of experience in living out the Gospel practically, in ways that make one think of the lives of the first Christians, as Acts 4:32 describes them: "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."

The companies belonging to the

Economy of Communion put people, not money, at the centre. What far-reaching consequences that has for management and for relations with customers, suppliers, creditors, the environment, and internal working conditions! It creates nothing less than a new, sustainable business culture. The entrepreneurs in the Economy of Communion have, according to their own statements, a "silent partner" through their faith in God's provision, as exemplified in Jesus' injunction to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:32).

Here are two specific examples. A rural bank in the Philippines has flourished thanks to the unexpected help of a consultant company that is a member of the Economy of Communion. Its volume of business ranks the bank among the largest five rural banks in the Philippines, allowing it to have opened eight new branches, despite the recent economic crisis.

Meanwhile, in Genoa, Italy, two employers have created a cooperative (Roberto Tassano) which has spawned a variety of activities related to personal, volunteer service to the sick and elderly. Nine hundred people are actively involved in this project.

For more information, see www.focolare.org.

The images themselves provide part of the answer. A human society, including its economy, consists of more than a mechanism geared to achieving the maximum material prosperity possible. No tree, for example, will coerce its trunk to simply grow as tall as possible, at all costs. That would destroy the most delicate cells, and it would put much heavier pressure on the soil. Every tree, in other words, possesses a built-in form of restraint. It has the capacity to stop growing in height. And precisely when it stops growing tall, the tree is able to build up energy reserves which it later uses to produce fruit.

Images have limitations. But they can illustrate a profound truth. Economically speaking, if we can prevent damage to the environment and harm to people, at the outset instead of compensating them afterwards, how much will we have gained for the world as a whole! Surely it is a form of superstition to believe that financial compensation given after the damage is done (and which generally fails to materialize) can right what went wrong. Money has no liberating power. So much would be gained for people and the environment if we could further develop the capacity of economic restraint in the culture of the rich countries. Indeed, slowing down the pace of unlimited growth in production and consumption, for the sake of others, is not just a good ethical requirement. It reflects a healthy and mature insight into what only a flowering economy can provide.

We therefore categorically reject the position that “There Is No Alternative” to today’s dominant pattern of globalization, in which those who expand the most aggressively win. Not only is the alternative possible, it already exists in a number of areas in our world society, where care is a priority before deciding on the scope of production, and where there is a willingness to share economic activity. Consider the Focolare movement (see box, The Focolare movement), for example, which has spawned the “Economy of Communion” in a number of countries, and Oikocredit, which has been called “the poor man’s World Bank” (see box, Oikocredit).

The international structural approach needed

But even if people embrace a different lifestyle and way of thinking, would that in itself result in a more just and ecologically healthy economy? Simply mapping out the complex problems is nearly an impossible task, let alone finding solutions in today’s obstinate political climate. But here too the work has already begun. Respected Dutch economist Jan Tinbergen, a Nobel prizewinner, formulated a wonderfully simple idea for the world monetary system. Suppose we examine, he suggested, how a well-run country manages its monetary system. If finances can be managed well

at a national level, he asked, then why can they not also be well-managed at a global level? Tinbergen noted that every well-run country manages three key financial institutions. The first is a central bank, which ensures that money circulates in a way that is as stable as possible. Then there are banks which use people's savings to invest in businesses. Finally, the Ministry of Finance spends the taxes levied according to the national plans and priorities.

On a world scale, Tinbergen observed, we find the beginnings of a central bank (the International Monetary Fund) and an investment bank (the World Bank), but no evidence of the third institution. Tinbergen argued that, to have a well-functioning international monetary system, the IMF and the World Bank must first be structured democratically. But then they must also

Oikocredit

Oikocredit is an international ecumenical cooperative established in 1975 by the World Council of Churches and the Council of Churches in the Netherlands. The object was to offer church money managers an investment instrument that would be closer to the Sermon on the Mount than to Wall Street. Since then, almost 500 churches, religious orders and congregations from all continents — including Canada — have joined. In addition, about 20,000 church groups, parishes and individuals take part through 30 support organizations. Since its inception, participants have deposited the equivalent of 160 million euros (\$249 million Canadian) into capital shares that grow by 20 million euros annually. Loans are given from this money to groups of people in the Third World who are too poor to qualify for normal bank credit, such as coffee farmers, micro credit

organizations, small milk factories, small fishing boat operations, etc. At the end of 2001, the loan portfolio supported 307 projects in 50 countries at a total amount of 113 million euros. Although the Oikocredit office is located in The Netherlands, two-thirds of the Board comes from the Third World. The South holds the majority of voting rights, and every shareholder has a vote, irrespective of how many shares a person has.

Oikocredit has created a new economic model that in many aspects deviates from the model followed by normal banks. The model involves:

- control by people in the South
- loans given to so-called "unbankables", groups that banks stay far away from
- lower interest, longer terms, fewer guarantees required
- a maximum 2% dividend on investments

become coupled together under a kind of World Ministry of Finance.

As we saw earlier, the most significant problem plaguing the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank is that both were created in a period when most poor countries were still colonies and largely served the interests of the wealthier countries. Applying democratic principles requires that their methods of decision-making and their attention shift towards the majority of the world's population. Furthermore, certain decisions of the type that a Ministry of Finance makes must be made on a world scale. Tinbergen wanted a "world treasury." Certain important matters, such as a more just international distribution of wealth, the protection of the environment, and maintenance of an international order of justice, must be overseen at a global level. He further

To the amazement of many, the plan has worked. Over the years about 70 million euros have been paid back in loans and interest, by people whom normal banks would not entrust with a penny. In all of those years, less than 15 percent of loans have defaulted. Oikocredit itself has paid dividends in each of the past 13 years. Not one of the investors has lost a cent. Anyone who invested 5000 euros in 1989 and needs their money back today would receive it.

Money therefore plays a different role. The investor does not become poorer, while others, who have not received any previous affirmation whatsoever, are able to better themselves as a result and become connected to the local economy. Oikocredit is indeed "Money in the Service of Life" — money directed towards restoring justice. This enterprise is a living embodiment of the request from the Churches

in Argentina to the Churches in the North to "build up commercial and economic international relationships based on justice and equality" (see Appendix 1).

In The Netherlands, more than 1,100 church groups, church wardens, commissions and parishes, and more than 6,000 individuals have participated in Oikocredit with investments of almost 45 million euros. Oikocredit was the first fund recognized by the government of the Netherlands as an Ethical Investment Fund. That has resulted in important tax exemptions.

There is an active Canadian Oikocredit support organization, as well as a number of local Canadian Oikocredit groups. For more information, see www.oikocredit.org/ca, or email canada.sa@oikocredit.org. For general information on Oikocredit, see www.oikocredit.org.

argued for reforming the international monetary system by introducing a new type of international currency based on the value of about 30 natural resources, rather than on gold or the dollar.

Tinbergen's proposals date from 1964. Had they been accepted at the time, they would have ensured higher and more stable prices for natural resources. That, in turn, would have prevented the deep debt crisis plaguing the poor countries today. The rich countries have repeatedly shoved these ideas to the sidelines. But in these perilous times, can we not breathe new life into them?

Democratizing international organizations remains absolutely essential, but so is creating the financial resources needed for essential public expenditures on a global plane. In order to achieve that, James Tobin, another Nobel prize-winning economist, proposed a global tax linked to the international currency exchange, the so-called Tobin tax. The amount levied — the suggestion is a tariff of .2 percent on all international financial transactions — would not only generate billions of dollars. It would also create a dampening effect on the uncontrolled streams of speculative capital in the world, which have such crippling effects on the poor countries. The legal grounds for such a tax exists. If money has become a “product”, then why should it not be taxed like other products?

The political step of moving from voluntary donations to compulsory contributions is huge, but if globalization is to serve life, it is essential.

W hat will help? Can ordinary people contribute something

Have we not paid too much attention to “the grand plan” of changing the huge global economy? What can ordinary people accomplish in their towns, districts, churches or parishes? Or does the enormous power of the global economy render our own forms of sharing, restraint and austerity meaningless?

We argue emphatically that it does not. Consider two reflections. First, church communities, parishes, congregations and religious orders are groups of people who have not somehow accidentally come together. Instead, they are groups whose members know that they need each other in order to learn, live and serve together. They are held together particularly by a common experience of God's Word, on the way to the Kingdom of God.

It is significant that our sisters and brothers in the South and the East speak to us as church

communities. They know that we have a language and a promise — the Word — in common. They know that that language and promise relate to both church and society. They therefore appeal to us on the basis of our joint responsibility for the future of the earth. We may not dodge that responsibility by claiming neutrality and passivity.

Some people, especially some outside the church, will say: “Churches ought not to concern themselves with these kinds of questions. There needs to be a separation of church and state.” But the separation of church and state hardly means that they may not carry out a critical dialogue. Further, the church may simply not be silent if society pursues a direction that fundamentally deviates from the norms and values of the Gospel. That conviction drove the so-called Confessing Churches to speak out in Nazi Germany during the Second World War and the South African Council of Churches to do likewise during the apartheid regime. It also compelled the Pope to speak out publicly against our society’s all-encompassing materialism during the observance of the Year of Jubilee in Rome. Ought the churches to remain silent in our time when the pursuit of profit and materialism increasingly grips society, and when the companies for which people work to earn their bread simply become playthings of those who play with money, and of the anonymous forces of the stock market? Must churches remain silent when governments increasingly become opportunity-providers for the mighty and powerful, instead of protectors of the weak? All of that conflicts with the Gospel.⁵

Secondly, Christians cherish the hope that there is a meaningful way to the future. That hope affects not just their church communities. Remarkably enough, it touches all of us, as ordinary people in our own surroundings.

Jesus used a beautiful image of hope: the image of the Morning Star. “I am the bright Morning Star” appears among the last verses of the New Testament (Rev. 22:16). The image refers to the actions of Esther (whose name means Morning Star) during the time of Jewish exile. In the midst of a situation of fate and doom, Esther, a trembling young woman, at the end of a period of fasting (which coincided with the time of Passover), went to her husband the Emperor. There she pleaded for the salvation of her people, who had been condemned to death. Ordinary people are important in the Bible. Sometimes God waits expressly for them, in order to link the power of his redemption to their humble acts of faith.

But the image of Jesus as the Morning Star also has another meaning. The Morning Star — the planet Venus — appears precisely when the night is at its darkest. Nothing seems capable of overcoming the all-encompassing darkness, certainly not the weak light of that one star or planet so far away. Yet the image of the Morning Star suggests that that so-called “realistic” view of

reality is in fact not realistic. True realism knows that, as soon as the Morning Star appears, the night has already been defeated. The darkness, however overpowering it may seem, has no choice but to withdraw in the face of that small star, which draws the morning in behind it.

That biblical image was used by the writer of the book of Revelation to encourage first century Christians in a time of great persecution. But it can also encourage us today. The image points to the expectation of God's Kingdom of justice and righteousness. That Kingdom may seem hidden and insignificant, but it shall fill the earth. And ordinary people, like us, may dare to live from out of it, even when — especially when — the surrounding darkness is so great.

On the way towards this great future of God, globalization plays a role. It too has a place in the great hope of salvation. But globalization today has hardly generated a just pattern of living and working in the world. Instead, it has adopted a course which misses the mark. It systematically overburdens people and the environment and consciously puts the lives of millions of people in jeopardy.

Thankfully, however, as people and as societies, together we may also choose life. Instead of clinging compulsively to the automatic operation of the tunnel economy, we may choose to care creatively for our fellow human beings and for the environment in all forms of society. And we may do so even in the smallest area of where we live and work.

In this time of globalization, the deepest resistance against doom, fear and powerlessness comes from living not just *towards* the future but *from out* of the future, the future of God's coming reign of justice and righteousness for all the earth.

Appendix I

Dialogue between churches of the South and the North

In June 2002, representatives from various churches in Western Europe met in Soesterberg, The Netherlands. One of the primary purposes of their consultation was to develop a response by Western European churches to serious questions raised by churches in the South about the process of globalization and the role of Christians in the North in that process. A previous version of this paper, which has been distributed widely among Christians in The Netherlands, was one of the resource documents for that consultation.

Appendix I begins with two letters written to the churches in the North which, in part, prompted churches in Western Europe to meet in Soesterberg. It concludes with a letter drafted at the consultation in response.

Letter to the churches of the North

From the participants of the WCC-WARC-CCA-CCT-ACFOD Symposium on the Consequences of Economic Globalization (November 12-15, 1999, Bangkok, Thailand)

The Symposium was jointly organized by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), and the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD). It was attended by over 60 people from various sectors of society in Thailand, and from 19 other countries, namely Canada, China, Costa Rica, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, the Netherlands, the Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Uganda, and Vanuatu.

Meeting in Bangkok, we have come from different countries in Asia and elsewhere. Comparing the experiences of our economies and people; having listened to the stories and cries of farmers, women, indigenous peoples, fisher folk, the urban poor and slum dwellers of Thailand, and sharing similar experiences as reported from India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, the

Philippines and Sri Lanka, we are struck by the commonality of the extremely deadly consequences of debt and globalization of the economy on our societies and nature.

We, as a Christian community, affirm that we are the members of the same body of Christ. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it (I Cor. 12:24). The economy is a social framework that is supposed to sustain the body of Christ. However, today's economic order promoted by neo-liberalism contributes to dismantling the community rather than sustaining it. We were re-convinced by the Bangkok symposium that many members are not only suffering, but also being systemically excluded. Many people in the South say that today's economy is intolerable and people in the North also say so. How can our faith affirmation of being the body of Christ be justifiable if more and more members are suffering and excluded?

Growing impoverishment, increasing inequality in income distribution, the treatment of workers as cheap labour, the feminization of poverty, an increase in child labour and trafficking of children, and ecological destruction affecting the health and livelihood of the rural poor were revealed by the symposium as concrete consequences of economic globalization based on neo-liberalism. Moreover, rates of poverty, suicide and crime have doubled since Asian countries faced economic crisis and the International Monetary Fund intervened in response to the crisis. The number of poor people in Thailand increased from 7 million in 1997 to an estimated 12 million out of a total population of 63 million. The suicide rate also increased from 10 per 100,000 to 14 or 15 per 100,000 and the number of prisoners had increased from 66,000 in 1997 to 170,000 in 1998.

Ironically, even as the poor were terribly hit by the economic crisis, the percentage of national income earned by the rich minority increased from 20.5 % to 22.5 % in Thailand, from 22 % to 24.5 % in Korea, and from 39.3 % to 42.9% in the Philippines. This data shows that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening due to the present trend of economic globalization.

Next to the pains and sufferings in the South, there are the sufferings and threats in the North. We heard about poverty, coming back in even your richest societies; we received reports about environmental destruction in your midst, and about alienation, loneliness and the abuse of women and children. And all that is occurring while most of your churches are losing members. We asked ourselves: is most of that not also related to being rich, desiring to become richer than most of you already are? Is there not a delusion in the Western view on man and society, which always looks to the future and wants to improve it, even when that implies an increase of suffering in your societies and in the South? Did you not forget the richness which is related to sufficiency, enough, saturation? If, according to Ephesians 1, God is preparing in human history to bring

everyone and everything under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, His Shepherd King, His own globalization, shouldn't caring and sharing for and with each other be the main characteristic of our lifestyle, instead of giving in fully to the secular trend of a growing consumerism?

What has happened to our common faith in God, in Christ, and the church universal? What has happened to the basic teaching of common stewardship and Christian solidarity with the suffering neighbour, who is in fact a member of the same body of Christ? We see and experience a contradiction of the above as manifested in the unchallenged idol worship of mammon rather than God.

We are convinced that the time has come for a return to the fundamental and undiluted teachings of the Gospel. It is time for all of us to make a choice: God or mammon. We know that some churches in the North are very active in this regard and we feel strong solidarity with their actions. But the present situation invites us to stand up all together.

We call for concrete acts of solidarity to alleviate the massive suffering of our nations in the North and in the South.

We call for urgent action on your part to address your governments and the institutions that are designing and implementing the present globalization project.

We call for a process of study of the current economic system and its consequences in our midst, in the light of our common faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour, who showed us caring and sharing as members of God's family.

Economic injustice is a violation of the basic tenets of our common faith. We call on you to join us in confessing that the economy is a matter of faith.

Letter of the churches of Argentina to the churches in the North

To our sister churches, agencies and Christian institutions in the Northern Hemisphere

Dear sisters and brothers:
Arriving at the end of the Season of Advent, and with our look already set to the Manger of the Nativity at Bethlehem, the eruption of a social explosion in our country doesn't allow us to look at a horizon of peace. Our horizon is, in many senses, very similar to that at Bethlehem where the Empire imposed on the people laws and projects which did not allow for people's happiness.

In this context, from the God-Made-Flesh outlook, we should, as churches, run the risk of being witnesses to the dignity of all people answering the call of being servants to the truth and to justice. Emmanuel, God with us, should be the basis to build a more just and sensitive world, a world in solidarity with the excluded, looking towards them, as it is from them that hope comes.

All Christians are called to be witnesses to peace, a peace which is born from the will to build a more inclusive society, a society where everybody can find a place with dignity. Witnesses to a peace that is nurtured in justice and in truth.

The Christian Church is a universal body that includes the concept of equality before God and brotherhood between people which is unique to it. The concept of communion offers the possibility and the duty of building narrow solidarity nets which embrace the whole earth. On this basis we appeal today, concretely, to your support from each one of your places.

All that is happening these days in Argentina, and what has been brought to the attention of the international community through the media, again highlights the injustice in our country, together with its record of corruption, irresponsibility and insensitivity by the ruling class. However, at the same time it is an opportunity to call to the attention of the Northern Hemisphere, in their North-South relations, that we also have a history of 500 years of painful and unjust international relations.

In this history, full of sin, a huge transfer of natural resources, products of all kinds and labour from the South to the North has resulted in a huge accumulation of wealth in the North, bringing enormous profits to that part of the world up to the present day. This leads to the fact that any proposal to change the situation in the South implies some deep changes in the lifestyle of the North.

This transfer of wealth started with the conquest of America, continued throughout the centuries of colonial power, and is still continuing today by the transferring of huge profits of transnational enterprises and in the form of interest on a debt which is a heavy burden for our people. Here the irresponsibility of the ruling sector of our country played the game in the last decades and at the present. The effects of this debt on the current policy, as in Argentina, has been disastrous. The debt, besides having originated in an unjust economic relation, is illegal. It generates corruption and impunity in order to continue.

We call upon churches, agencies and Christian institutions in the North to consider the following crucial issues which we have already raised in the past:

1) We request you to use all means and possibilities to build up commercial and economic international relationships based on justice and equality.

2) We ask you to use the same means and possibilities to help us to alleviate the burden of the international debt, which is producing misery, and is killing millions of people.

3) We request you to consider concrete signs of self restriction favouring the needy in the South, and to implement concrete signs of solidarity with those who are suffering more deeply.

God created the North and the South (Ps. 89:12) and once and for all, the dominion of one over the other must stop!

We wish to express our gratitude to all those individuals and institutions in the North involved in the creation of just international relations and solidarity networks. We encourage you to continue working towards a transformation of the global “ladder” in which those “above” enjoy life and those others “below” suffer, into a bridge over which we may embrace and all can talk.

We greet you in Christ, Head of the Universal Church to which we belong, here in the South and there in the North.

Buenos Aires, December 20, 2001

Economy in the Service of Life

Response from the Soesterberg consultation to the letter to the churches in the North from the Bangkok symposium, the message from the Fiji consultation and a call by churches in Argentina.

From June 15-19, 2002, more than 80 representatives from Western European churches, as well as guests from churches in Central and Eastern Europe, North America, Africa and Asia, from the Vatican and from ecumenical organizations gathered in Soesterberg, The Netherlands, for a consultation with the guiding theme: *Economy in the Service of Life*. This consultation was graciously hosted by the National Council of Churches in The Netherlands. It took place under the joint auspices of the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Conference of European Churches and the European Area Committee of WARC.

The Letters to the Churches in the North from the Bangkok consultation and messages from the other consultations in the joint ecumenical process that were held in Budapest and Fiji informed the discussion taking place at our consultation. Once more, we listened to the cries emanating from the financial crises in Asia, Russia, and more recently Argentina. Lives and hopes have been shattered; people lost their lives; everyday survival has become a struggle for many.

We heard that impoverishment is growing on a daily basis; the gap in income distribution is widening; the numbers of migrants increase; trafficking in children and their economic exploitation is rife. There is an explosion of social violence; family life is disrupted and more and more women bear the brunt of poverty and violence. At the same time, growing inequality leads to increasing numbers of migrants who are withheld the same rights as other citizens and find themselves and their families in very difficult circumstances, often confronted with new expressions of racism. We also shared our deep concerns about the militarization of global politics and increased military spending. The new focus on security undermines the sense of shared vulnerability of human communities and of solidarity with those who lose out in the process of economic globalization.

The participants in a *Symposium on the Consequences of Economic Globalization* held in Bangkok in November 1999, have stated in their message to the churches in the North that “economic injustice is a violation of the basic tenets of our common faith.” They encourage us as Christians in the Northern hemisphere to develop a culture of caring and sharing, bearing in mind the essential unity of the one body of Christ. In addition, we are encouraged by our brothers and sisters in Argentina “not to resign [ourselves] to the present situation, but to listen with renewed attention to God’s Word, and to accompany all those who suffer and to practice solidarity with those in the greatest need.”⁶ We are called upon to “run the risk of being witnesses.”⁷ The message of the Fiji consultation shares with us the motivating image of the Island of Hope and refers to alternatives emerging from the peoples and their cultures in the different regions of the world.

As a response to their cries, their encouragement and their calls, we emphasize the following in affirmation of the basic human values stated by the North/South Working Group of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches:⁸

Jesus Christ says: “The thief comes only to steal, and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

We affirm

- life in its fullness for all: God’s household, the divine economy, comprises the whole earth and all who dwell on it.

We acknowledge that our being church together has been and is being deeply hurt by

- involvement of Christians in colonial conquests and support for colonial powers in the past;
- the fact that many of our societies are still contributing to unequal and unjust North-

South relations today, while Christians in many of our churches do not agree on the analysis of the situation and the actions required from us;

- our failure to listen and to respond sufficiently to the pain of the excluded, the exploited, the displaced and the hopeless in the South and among us;
- the fact that we do not resist strongly enough the idolatrous and exclusive character of the neo-liberal doctrine and practice of the ‘free market economy’, leading to intolerable inequality and the destruction of the environment which you experience in your countries;
- avoiding risking insecurity for the sake of the poor and the disempowered as an expression of our shared vulnerability,
- opting for compromise when we should challenge those with political and economic power to build an economy in the service of life and protect social, cultural and economic rights.

Overcoming neo-liberal globalization

We do not subscribe to the widespread assumption that “there is no alternative” to economic globalization as now guided by the neo-liberal economic doctrine, nor do we believe that economic globalization is a leaderless process. There are people in charge. As Christians, we must and will approach and challenge them, even more so because many of them are members of our churches.

Neo-liberal economic globalization can and does divide and exclude. This is true in the South as well as in our societies. It can and does violate the Gospel of life by causing agony for many. As Christians, we constitute the one body of Christ. If one part of the body suffers, all the others suffer as well. Economic globalization threatens to tear the fellowship, the *koinonia* of the one body of Christ apart. Our biblical tradition reminds us that we are called to follow Jesus Christ in all spheres of life and that we have to choose between God or mammon, life or death (Mt 6:24, Dtn 30:11 ff).

Membership of our churches in Western Europe is declining and the prevailing values in society are less and less influenced by Christian values. We are challenged in many ways by this reality. We need to hear and to respond in new ways to the call of the Gospel to speak with a prophetic voice to the societies in which we are living. In response to God’s promise of life, and in response to the voices from the churches in the South, members of the same body of Christ, we will engage in concrete actions of solidarity and sharing. We will remind members of our churches to witness to God’s justice by preaching, liturgy and education. We will remind our members working in those institutions in which political and economic decisions are made that

they must work towards life-sustaining policies for peoples and nations. We will question and challenge the national and international institutions who bear responsibility in the globalization process, in particular those involved in finance, development and trade, calling on them to become more accountable to people and to develop policies that will lead toward a more equitable distribution of wealth.

We encourage ourselves and each other:

- to join together in ecumenical processes to more seriously commit ourselves, from out of our faith convictions, to work more vigorously for justice in the economy and on the earth,
- to struggle together for all to enjoy life in all its fullness,
- to analyse the destructiveness of the current economic system and to speak out against the injustices of economic globalization ,
 - to search for alternatives by providing financial and spiritual support, and to support already existing and newly emerging economic and social alternatives like Oikocredit, the economy of communion of the Focolare movement, and fair trade,
 - to join hands with civil and social movements to further our common struggle,
 - to adopt self-restraint and simplicity in lifestyle, in resistance to the dominating cultural patterns of consumerism,
 - to call for the establishment of a truth forum, as suggested by the Argentinian Federation of Evangelical Churches,⁹ and subsequently
 - to seek redress for injustices, such as illegitimate debts and unfair trade conditions.

In order to walk together towards an economy in the service of life we need to learn from each other and to remind each other of the one hope that unites us: Christ and his life-giving Gospel. God calls us to give account of the hope that is in us. Brothers and sisters, call us to account if we violate that very hope in our logic, in our spirit and in our praxis.

Appendix II

Organizing around globalization

We encourage you to undertake further reflection on globalization by organizing an event in your church or community

If you are interested in organizing an event about globalization, here are a few suggestions:

Staff from the Citizens for Public Justice or from your church's relief and development agency may be able to suggest names of an expert speaker whom you could invite to give a talk at such an event. You could also consult the Christian justice organization Kairos, www.kairoscanada.org. Kairos brings together Christians across Canada to work on a range of justice issues, including international development concerns and debt relief.

You could also organize an evening with the help of this paper. You could use the paper to introduce the topic yourself, or you could have the participants read the paper ahead of time. Then create an opportunity for discussion. In either case, having a discussion together afterwards is a good idea. Such a discussion, whether plenary or in small groups, could tackle the following questions:

- The first part of this paper talked about a feeling of impotence that many people experience in the face of the globalization process. Do you recognize that feeling? If so, where do you feel especially powerless? If you do not feel powerless, why do you think that many others feel a sense of powerlessness?
- Can you describe what, in your opinion, are the advantages and disadvantages of globalization today?
- Do you share the opinion expressed in the paper that we live in a materialistic age, and that money controls the lives of many people? Does that apply to you?
- What do you think of the position that the churches must oppose the negative conse-

quences of globalization?

- Do you see possibilities in your own life for being in solidarity with people in the Third World?

With your group, you could also attempt to draft a response to the “Letter to the Churches of the North” written by churches from the South. Do you share the critique presented by the churches of the South? How would you answer them? What points do you find important?

Another possibility is to organize a Bible study group based on this paper.

Finally, you could develop an event with a view towards starting a local chapter of Oikocredit. Contact the Canadian branch of the organization for further information and ideas at canada.sa@oikocredit.org.

Notes on

Globalization and Christian Hope: Economy in the Service of Life

This paper was produced under the auspices of the International Financial System Project Group of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands. In addition to contributing editors Leo Andringa and Bob Goudzwaard, contributors include: Ineke Bakker, General Secretary of the Council of Churches of the Netherlands, Jan Van Burgsteden, Assistant Bishop of Haarlem, Ad van Luyns, Bishop of Rotterdam, Gert van Maanen, Piet Terhal and Greetje Witte-Rang.

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Notes on

The Public Justice Resource Centre

The Citizens for Public Justice promotes research and discussion of core values and faith perspectives in Canadian public policy debates, based on biblical principles of love, justice and compassion. Its work includes research, critical analysis, publishing and citizen education on a range of public policy issues. The CPJ works with a network of associates across Canada, and shares staff with Citizens for Public Justice in Toronto.

The CPJ's recent publications include:

- *Nation to Nation: Aboriginal Sovereignty and the Future of Canada*, edited by John Bird, Lorraine Land and Murray MacAdam

- *Justice Not Just Us: Faith Perspectives and National Priorities*, by Gerald Vandezande

- *Faith and Public Life: Challenges, Choices and Opportunities*

- *Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Towards a Canadian Economy of Care*, by Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange

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Endnotes

1. Organized by the South Asian Council of Churches, together with the World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.
2. The letter is reproduced in full in Appendix I.
3. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS), nr. 28.
4. From an address given by Mgr. A.H. van Luyn, sdb, during the conference “Globalization and Social Justice” on May 1, 2001, in Amersfoort, The Netherlands.
5. Within the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, discussion is taking place about whether the now dominant trend in the global economy ought to be viewed as sinful and in conflict with the Christian confession. Within WARC, people have embraced a process of consciousness raising and education in the churches in order to prepare its members for an eventual decision about this (just as apartheid and the persecution of Jews became viewed as in conflict with the Christian confessions).
6. *Message to the churches* by CLAI, Faith, Economy and Society Program Advisory Group, January 21, 2002.
7. Letter by Argentinian churches *To our sister churches, agencies and Christian institutions in the Northern Hemisphere*, December 20, 2001.
8. Cf. chapter 5 of the document of the North/South Working Group of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches: “European social market economy – an alternative model for globalization?”
9. cf. endnote 7.