The Challenge of Imperial Globalization to Theological Education: Liberation from Violent, Possessive Individualism towards Life in Relationships
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“Today we are faced with life-killing civilization, manifested in economic injustice, ecological destruction, the threat of Empire, and the escalation of religious conflicts. This compels us to urgently explore the possibility of life-giving civilization which affirms relationships, co-existence, harmony with creation, and solidarity with those who struggle for justice. This quest finds meaning in Ubuntu and Sangsaeng.”
(WCC-CWM ChangSeong Consultation 12-17 Aug. 2007 on Transforming Theology and Life-giving civilization)

These words of 35 theologians from Asia, Africa and other parts of the world capture exactly what we are about to meditate on. We live in a life-killing global system, we are called by our own biblical basis – re-read in the spirit of other than Western traditions – to search for life-giving alternatives and challenged to develop theological education accordingly. Let us look at these three components one by one.

I. The context of theological education today:

Neo-liberal, imperial globalization as the climax of a violent, possessive civilization of domination, social devastation and ecological destruction

The book “Diversified Theological Education Equipping All God's People”, edited by Ross Kinsler, stresses that context analysis is the first of three main and necessary characteristics of theological education. This, however, is easier said than done. In former times we would have defined “context” in local, national and specific cultural terms. Nowadays these specific features are co-determined by a global system, which in itself has many dimensions: economic, ecological, political, ideological, religious, cultural, anthropological, psychological etc. and all of these again to be seen from a historical and interdisciplinary perspective. So we face a complex problem.

It is not difficult to name the facts. Everybody – at least in this congress – knows them. In the 24th General Council meeting of WARC in Accra 2004 they were presented in a power point presentation under the title of “shocking figures”.

Just to name a few:
- Between 30 and 40 million people die from hunger or its consequences every year. This is now being worsened through the shortage and sky-rocketing prices of food, created by agro-fuel and meat production for the rich as well as through the speculation on food prices by financial capital;
- The empire of global capital and its agents is more and more accompanied by violent imperialism of the USA and Europe, where all headquarters of the 10 biggest TNCs are situated – leading to imperial wars like in Afghanistan and Iraq, to counter-terrorism and to civil wars, fed by the socio-economic disaster.
One of the pictures showed that between 1850 and 1950 one animal species vanished every year; around 1989 one animal species vanished per day; around the year 2000 one animal species vanished per hour. The recent figures of 2008 speak of one species dying out every 10 minutes. According to the report of the International Panel on Climate Change, the percentage of vanished species is going to be 30% within 50 years. And climate change also leads to catastrophes such as recently occurred in Myanmar etc. etc. Since Accra the ecological crisis has dramatically worsened and, therefore, must move into the centre of theology.

In spite of the evidence of the facts, many, including churches in Europe, are not clear on how to interpret them, how to analyse the systemic root causes and how to judge them theologically. The first thing to remember is the wide ecumenical consensus that refuses to speak of a *process* of globalization in which one can discern positive and negative elements. What rather has to be distinguished is, on the one hand, the *process* of growing global interdependencies and growing communication, which has good and bad elements, and, on the other hand, the neo-liberal *project* of global capitalism that subjects life in all of its dimensions to the one abstract logic of capital accumulation. It is this logic that the broad ecumenical consensus views as a death-creating monster, totally negative, doomed to be suicidal in the long run. This project has clearly recognizable actors and strategies.

It has been *ideologically* prepared by a transnational network of neo-liberal thinkers – above all organized in the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) under the leadership of Friedrich August von Hayek.1 With the support of think-tanks, reorganized university institutes, the buying out and founding of magazines and the training of journalists, economists, politicians and prominent figures in the church, the MPS has developed and set into motion a successful strategy to win back “hearts and minds” for the ideological hegemony of liberalism which was lost in the catastrophe of the break down of the classical liberal system in 1929. In the meantime this ideological power structure has become frightening and nearly total. The vast majority of private media, public relation firms, foundations and think-tanks are in the hands of the same capital owners who profit from the system. Read the book of William Engdahl on the Rockefeller Foundation and its criminal activities regarding oil, seeds and genetic engineering.2 Yet it is not only the general public that is being targeted by these networks (even cooperating with the intelligence agencies) but churches, schools and universities. In the USA e.g. more than 30 theological institutions have been

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created to produce capitalist theology. The fundamentalist perversion of religion represented by George W. Bush legitimating social degradation, tax cuts for the rich, sabotage of global ecological policies and imperial wars is only the tip of the iceberg. In Germany most churches hire public relation firms to market their product and do not recognize the Trojan horse they are buying etc. etc. All of this is of highest importance for theological education. One of its most important tasks must be ideology critique.

Politically and militarily, as well as by way of intelligence services, the USA, beginning in 1953 in what was then Persia, removed socially responsible governments and, with the support of local elites, installed national security dictators, the likes of which are notoriously well-known in Latin America, Asia and Africa. It was the task of these military dictatorship to open up access to natural resources, production sites and markets for transnational capital and, through the purchase of usually second-class Western industrial products and prestige projects, to propel their governments into debt. This, in turn, gave international creditors and finance institutions the opportunity to steer and exploit the national economies through their heavily indebted public budgets. In the meantime, the West has moved back to open imperialism. Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq are the well-known examples. But every country could be hit as well according to the National Security Strategy of the USA, NATO and in the future also of the EU. Here the new Lisbon Treaty asks for a permanent arms race in order to be equipped for intervening everywhere in the world for the purpose of economic interests. In content it is identical with the former constitutional treaty voted down by the French and Dutch citizens. But now it is about to be ratified, because the peoples of Europe have no right to vote against it – a disaster for democracy in Europe. The Lisbon Treaty re-enforces what is being called “Empire with imperialism” by making Europe a sub-empire within and partly in competition with the US. So political analysis and critique is another central task of theological education.

Economically, the neo-liberal strategy has been implemented through privatization, liberalization and the deregulation of international capital markets which then, in addition to their free, speculative “casino games”, could and still can drive up already high interest rates and avoid taxes on capital gains with the help of tax havens. This is the way in which the growing gap between private wealth and public poverty is widened. The sole objective of the present

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6 This refers to the catchword sometimes used to describe this economic strategy as that of “casino capitalism”.

economy is the increase of capital returns at the cost of working people, public goods and services, as well as nature. Few people know that it was already Karl Marx who saw that the interconnectedness between social and ecological destruction. In his “Capital” he writes: 


In addition to and in connection with the production process capitalism creates desires in order to stimulate buying and consuming for accumulation purposes. This means that urban and rural industrialization, driven by finance capital, itself, not just the misuse of this economy, destroys the social and natural basis of humanity and the earth. So economic analysis from the perspective of life is key for theological education.

This leads us to the deep interrelation between the economy and anthropology in capitalism. It is based on granting an absolute character to private property and contracts which, competing in an absolute market, are responsible for the transmission of monetary profit and the accumulation of capital. Von Hayek gives classic expression to this:

“A free society needs moral ground rules which can ultimately be summarized by saying that they are for the preservation of life: not the preservation of all life because it might be necessary to sacrifice individual life in order to save a greater number of other lives. For that reason the only real moral rules are those which lead us to the ‘life calculation: private property and the contract.’

Based on the fallacy that there is not enough to go around for everybody, this means that private property and the ability to negotiate contracts in the marketplace become the judges of life and death or, more precisely, determine who the victims of this “human sacrifice” will be. The essence of neo-liberalism is the abolition of the social functions of the state and the latter’s transformation into a security state for property holders and entrepreneurs. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke first stated this in anthropological terms in the 17th century. They defined human beings as individual proprietors who always strive for more wealth, power and respect and therefore are involved in the one-against-all struggle in the marketplace. So private property and competitive individualism are the two sides of the same coin. But also the state gets its purpose on this

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7 MEW, vol. 23, 529f.
8 In an interview supporting Pinochet and his economic advisor, Milton Friedman, the latter also member of the MPS, published in the Chilean newspaper Mercurio, 19 April 1981.
basis. Hobbes and Locke conceptualized the fact in the political economy of capitalism that the sole function of the state in a capitalist context is the protection of property and contracts. Macpherson uses the term “possessive individualism” for this political-economical anthropology, which expresses particularly well the idea of “being possessed” that is included in this view. Possession leads to being possessed. And it leads to violence as Gandhi pointed out: “Where there is possessiveness, there is violence”.10

Everybody needs property for use in order to live with dignity. But those who have more than they need invest their surplus property as exchange value in the capitalist market in order to increase it further. The consequence is that through the exchange-value of property for accumulation, many people around the world are being robbed of their property for use which they need for a life in dignity. It is characteristic of neo-liberalism that, on the basis of the private ownership of the means of production, it not only sharpens the classical industrial capitalistic exploitation of workers, but even reverts to early capitalist forms of expropriation, called “original accumulation”. For this reason, it has justifiably been called “predatory capitalism”.11 So theological education must reject a capitalist anthropology that defines the human being as a competitive, possessive individual.

This again has psychological implications. Classical western psychology looks at the human psyche with individualistic, drive-theoretical methods. These do not recognize that, from the beginning, human beings are relational. The subject is formed and develops through all stages by inter-subjectivity, being affected positively or negatively. This is studied intensively by relational psychology. This school looks at the psychological effects of neo-liberal, imperial globalization. Neo-liberalism by its very nature divides people into individualized losers and winners destroying solidarity. Between them is the middle class in the form of various milieus (P. Bourdieu). According to new research all of these groups are characterized by different psychological captivities. The losers suffer from traumas. This has been researched particularly in the case of unemployment. The winners are captives to the addiction to win, a form of pathological narcissism. They must win and win and win in order not to lose in competition. The middle class is split into a majority of losers and a minority of winners. Its members are upwardly oriented and, consequently, filled with fear of decline. Because of early psychological patterns, members of middle-classes idealize the higher authority while internalizing the bad elements of it. This leads to depression and/or of projecting the aggressions at scapegoats beneath themselves (foreigners, Jews etc.). This in turn is instrumented by the upper classes to stop any coalition-building between lower and middle classes. These psychological insights should be integrated into theological education not

10 Gandhi, Discourses on the „Gita“, 1926, Collected Works, 32, 117.
only because of their theoretical and pastoral implications but also because of their tremendous political significance.

Capitalist economy is also intrinsically linked to western science and technology, the cultural factor. There is no doubt that this approach has also brought improvements for human life. However, taken as absolute and being isolated from social and ecological considerations, instrumental and objectivist reason destroys human and other life. Its main goal is maximizing power and profit (Francis Bacon, René Descartes). So theological education must basically reconsider epistemology.

Finally, capitalism itself is a religion as Walter Benjamin has pointed out. According to him it is the only religion causing people to be trapped in debt. All others offer forgiveness and reconciliation. Already Karl Marx has done the ground work to understand this by offering a penetrating analysis of the fetishism of commodities, money, and capital. It is crucial for theologians in a capitalist context to understand this critique of capitalism as religion, especially as Karl Marx is tabooed in bourgeois societies and churches in order to disguise the interests of the capital owners behind what is happening. The key of the fetishism analysis is to show that people are made to believe that it is not the workers creating value on the basis of the gifts of creation, but capital, consequently claiming to be worshipped as the giver of life. Listen to the climax of Marx’s analysis:

“The relations of capital assume their most externalized and most fetish-like form in interest-bearing capital… Capital appears as a mysterious and self-creating source of interest – the source of its own increase. The thing (money, commodity, value) is now capital even as a mere thing, and capital appears as a mere thing. The result of the process of reproduction appears as a property inherent in the thing itself. It depends on the owner of the money, i.e. of the commodity in its continually exchangeable form, whether he wants to spend it as money or loan it out as capital. In interest-bearing capital, therefore, this automatic fetish, self-expanding value, money generating money, are brought out in their pure state and in this form it no longer bears the birth-marks of its origin… This too becomes distorted. While interest is only a portion of the profit, i.e., of the surplus value, which the functioning capitalist squeezes out of the labourer, it appears now, on the contrary, as though interest were the typical product of capital, the primary matter, and profit, in the shape of profit of enterprise, were a mere accessory and by-product of the process of reproduction. Thus we get the fetish form of capital and the conception of fetish capital.”

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14 Marx, op. cit. 391f.
Look at the present reality of *financial capitalism*, also being called casino-capitalism. Not only workers, but governments, peoples and earth are at the mercy of the so-called “investors”. They appear to be saviors. We are being told that the investors bring development and improvement of life. In reality they bring destruction and death. Nothing counts but the maximum return for the shareholders of the investment agencies. Therefore, *critique of religion* is a crucial task of *theological education*.

Taking all these *dimensions of neo-liberal, imperial globalization together* we can see that they all have a totalizing tendency endangering life, albeit quite more subtle than fascism, Stalinism or the South African Apartheid system. So it needs prophetic clarity in conjunction with interdisciplinary research to name and unmask this power system. At the same time it is equally important to realize and analyze its contradictions and crises as well as the countervailing power of the people arising against it. We shall do this in the third part of our deliberations. Meanwhile let us look at the biblical-theological foundation of our critique as well as of our alternative vision drawing also from other disciplines and religions.

**II. The People of God called to witness to God’s humanness in loving relationships**

Ross Kinsler in the book on “Diversified Theological Education”, summarizing two former ones, published and edited together with Gloria Kinsler on “Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life” and “God’s Economy: Biblical Studies from Latin America”, has aptly outlined the central importance of the political economy for the understanding of the Scriptures and theological education. They use the concepts of the Sabbath and of Jubilee to outline the biblical vision of an economic order serving the life of all people and creation. Let me add three additional aspects concerning the contextual re-reading of the Bible elaborating on these excellent books – 1. the crucial role of a new economy since the 8th century B.C., built on property, interest and money; 2. the role of empire; and 3. the understanding of the human being in the context of creation – because these aspects are hermeneutically helpful for unleashing the power of the biblical witness and also other faiths and philosophies for today’s context. They will also help us to discover new visions for overcoming the paradigm of modernity and to connect with non-western cultures.

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15 In German we do have an excellent example of how this can be done: *Pax Christi, Kommission Weltwirtschaft (Hg.), 2006, Der Gott Kapital - Anstöße zu einer Religions- und Kulturkritik, LIT, Münster.*
Recent socio-historical and theological research has shown that already the Bible speaks directly to these issues of market mechanisms and empire on the basis of *property*.\(^\text{18}\) The historic roots of an economy based on private property beyond its use value date back to the 8\(^{\text{th}}\) century BCE. In Greece, peasants were able to liberate themselves from feudal bondage by owning land.\(^\text{19}\) It is those free landowners who formed the Polis, a city in the midst of an agricultural region (e.g. Athens in Attica). The importance of this property led to the introduction of “interest” on loans. A debtor had to pay back more than he had borrowed, e.g. seed. He also had to put his own land as a pawn. Could he not pay back, he lost his land and had to work as a debt slave for the creditor. The contracts on the loans started to be traded which according to some scholars led to the introduction of money, gradually developed in the forms of coins. So private property and money came into existence at the same time – linked to debt slavery and loss of land. On the other hand, the creditors could collect more and more land, money and debt slaves.

This resulted in increasingly *splitting societies* of the Ancient Near East up to North India. The situation worsened when the property-money-economy was spreading even more during the time of the Hellenistic Empires. Roman Law legalized the absoluteness of property. In one sentence: the Hellenistic-Roman *empires* are characterized by the linkage between totalitarian military, political and ideological power and the absoluteness of the property-interest-money economy.

The spread of this economy from Greece in the late 8\(^{\text{th}}\) and 7\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries BCE encountered different contexts and responses to them in the different regions of the Ancient Near East. Let us first look at *Israel*.\(^\text{20}\) With the new mechanism of property-interest-money since late 8\(^{\text{th}}\) century BCE the (small)holder producers had to suffer an additional dangerous attack on their livelihoods. Before they had to pay taxes to the king, the temple and for the luxury of the aristocratic upper class from their production. Now competition arose among themselves. The consequence was that many lost their land to the landowners with large estates and, to add insult to injury, had to work as debt slaves for them. How did the faithful believers in Yahweh react to this aggravation of the situation?

Four distinct ways to secure the practical consequences of faith in Yahweh can be observed over the centuries up to the Jesus movement and the early church:

- **Prophetic critique**

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\(^{18}\) See Duchrow/Hinkelammert, op.cit. Chapter 1.


• Legal provisions
• Acts of resistance
• Alternatives in small groups.\textsuperscript{21}

Precisely the wrong development in public and social life, caused by the new property economy, called forth the protest of the great prophets in the last third of the 8\textsuperscript{th} and then of the 7\textsuperscript{th} century starting with Amos. They called for law (mispat) and justice (sedeqa), which were lost through the new property law. But above all, repealing justice and the rights of the poor meant rejecting the God of Israel Godself for them. Knowing God is identical with creating justice for the poor (see e.g. Jer 22:16). The prophet Isaiah in the 7\textsuperscript{th} century criticized the expropriation of farming families and the accumulation of land in sharp terms: "Ah! You who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land!" (Is 5:8). He, too, calls the greedy land-owners "thieves" (1:23) and the seizure of the land of indebted farmers taking "the spoil of the poor" (3:14).

The prophetic critique of the 8\textsuperscript{th} and 7\textsuperscript{th} centuries was not totally unsuccessful. That is clear from the different legal reforms from that period and afterwards, promulgating prohibitive and restoring laws. The first took place in the early 7\textsuperscript{th} century BCE, reflected in the so-called Code of Covenant (Ex 21-23). Here we find e.g. the prohibition of interest and the regulation of taking pawns with the goal not to endanger the lives of indebted people and with the theological argument that Yahweh is "compassionate" (22: 24-26). In 622 BCE the Deuteronomic reform under king Josiah adds corrective measures like social "taxes" every third and debt cancellation as well as the liberation of debt slaves and a pause for the land every seventh year (Deut 14:28ff. and 15:1ff.). Here is the root of the Sabbath economics. After the traumatic experience of the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Judean upper classes by the Babylonians (in the beginning of the 6\textsuperscript{th} century BCE) there is a broad reflection on the issue: how to reorganize society after return from exile in order to avoid the systemic injustices with its disastrous consequences. One result is the Code of Holiness in the priestly writings (Leviticus). Here, besides the prohibition of interest etc. we find the famous jubilee regulation for the redistribution of land (the means of production in an agrarian society) every fiftieth year so that each family regains the basis for subsistence farming. The key theological argument is: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; and with me you are but aliens and tenants (Lev 25:23)." This means there must be no absolute property for human beings, land must not be made a commodity; God’s gifts are for the lives of all people.

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. Duchrow, U., 1995 (1998\textsuperscript{°}), Part II.
The same is expressed in the magna charta of the biblical “economy of the enough for all”, the story of manna (Exod 16). The bread given by God from heaven in the desert is enough for every person for each day. “…those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage” (v. 18). This is quoted in Deut 8 in the context of the accumulation of wealth in the 7th century by reminding the Judeans that God linked his rule of sharing to the gift of the manna bread “in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” – exactly the passage which Jesus quotes against Satan who tempts him to accumulate bread by transforming stones (Mt 4). Accordingly Jesus prays: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mt 6:11). This is the “economy of enough” in opposition to the economy of unlimited property accumulation through money mechanisms, linked to the idol Mammon.

When the accumulation of power and wealth becomes totalitarian as in the Hellenistic-Roman empires the only way for faithful Jews and followers of the Messiah Jesus to react is resistance and defiance. The classical text is the story of the three Jewish men resisting the worship of the golden statute of the emperor. They risk to be thrown into the furnace (Dan 3). Also Jesus practices resistance. This is most obvious in his prophetic confrontation with the temple (Mk 11:15-19). It is the economic centre of the priestly aristocracy robbing the poor for the sake of the temple treasure by the system of sacrifices and collaborating with the Roman Empire. Matthew, the evangelist (Mt 6:19-34), elucidates the same in the context of his topic "collecting treasures" on earth. “You cannot serve God and Mammon.” So the conflict is not just about material things but the God question. Who rules finally, the God of accumulation for the few owners or the compassionate God caring for the lives of all humans and creation as a whole?

Jesus himself adds another exciting option in view of the presence of the sovereignty of God destroying all domination of humans over humans through property and money mechanisms: the small scale alternatives in communities of faithful people, rebuilding the relationships destroyed by the property mechanisms. All what is needed for life will be given to those who first seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness, that is, a life in just relationships. This life of sharing is exemplified in the story of Jesus and his disciples feeding the 5000 (Mk 6:35ff.). The disciples want to go to the market. But Jesus empowers the people to feed each other by sharing what they have. This is enough for every body and more than enough. Sharing leads to abundant life: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

The early Christian community, filled with the Spirit, is living this alternative. The classical text is Acts 4:32-35. The congregation voluntarily shared its property. More exactly that means: those with land and houses sold them and
placed the proceeds at the apostles' feet. This wording can be no accident. After all, precisely the accumulation of land and houses had been attacked since Micah and Isaiah as a structural cause of the impoverishment of the farming population. And Jesus had called this robbery, in the same prophetic tradition, and demanded of the rich young land-owner that he sell his accumulated goods and give the proceeds back to the poor (whose land had been stolen through the mechanisms of property - interest-bearing loans – debt; Mk 10:17-22). And this balancing out of property was expressly described as the fulfillment of the Deuteronomic Torah, as the text in Acts continues: "There was not a needy person among them" (cf. Dt 15:4). At the same time, however, it says that they gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That means, in this way Jesus came alive among them not by their using their property as their own, to maximize personal profit and accumulate property, but by the community living together in such a way that there was no hardship among them. Jesus' resurrection means – economically speaking – life in community without need. That is the fulfillment of the Tora and the prophets in the First Testament.

Parallel to the understanding of economy and politics in the service of life there is the discovery of a new understanding of the human being in the image of God in the Bible, starting with the prophet Ezekiel. Walter Wink has worked this out in a book under the title “The Human Being”. During the Babylonian Exile, in the midst of the Babylonian Empire and in critical discussion with it in the sixth century before Christ, the prophet Ezekiel who had received a vision of God who seemed “like a human form” (Ez 1:26) was pressing toward revolutionary insights of man and woman as the image of God. This is reflected in the priestly writings: “So God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26-31). In the context of the ancient oriental world this entire text is revolutionary.

In the Babylonian Enuma Elish myth human beings were created out of the blood of a murdered God, in order to serve the gods — and especially to work for them, because the gods were tired of working. In the biblical text human beings are blessed and honored as man and woman to become God’s co-workers. Apart from this, in ancient oriental societies only the king is the image of God. In this case, to speak of the image of God meant an ideological legitimization of authority, and therefore of the right to not be obliged to work, but rather to let others work for them. In contrast to this ideology Gen 1:26-31 regards all human beings created in the image of God — to freely and responsibly work together with God in good relationships with one another. In this manner, this text, written by deportees in the Babylonian captivity, is an eminently subversive text, directed against imperial powers and forced labor through slavery. But also the relationship with animals and plants — contrary to the modern understanding of the dominium terrae as imperial conquering— is

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23 Ibid., p. 28.
characterized by care within the framework of God’s blessings. The human being has to deal with nature like a good king as described in Deut 17, caring for the poor and creating justice.24

- From the outset, human beings are created as *male and female in the image of God*, that is, as relational beings – both with regard to their mutual relationship and in their relationship with God.

- On this basis follows the surprising insight that *only God is fully human*. To be human as the imago dei, as the image of God, means becoming human in the sense of being oriented to God as the genuine human. Insofar as God becomes incarnate in us, we will become human. “Jesus embodied God in his own person in order to show us how we can embody God. And to incarnate God is what it means to be fully human”.25 In other words: the classical Eastern Orthodox theological concept of “theopoiesis” can be understood as “becoming truly human”. This, of course, in the tradition of the apophatic theology of e.g. Gregory of Nazianz, means that also the truly human, which is the divine, cannot be defined, controlled and manipulated. It transcends our perception and, to become truly human, needs the inspiration of God’s spirit.

- When the prophet Ezekiel, overwhelmed by this vision falls down on his face copying the proskynesis, the humiliation of the people in front of the Ancient Near East emperors, God puts him on his feet by saying: “O, human child, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet.” (2:1f.). God does not want God’s children to live with a servile mentality. They have to confront the powers that be, as Ezekiel is being told, and therefore, they need a bold spirit.

This is again confirmed in the book of *Daniel* in the famous vision in chapter 7. The world’s empires appear as carnivorous beasts, who are confronted and overcome by the Kingdom of God with a human face: “I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven” (v. 13).26 And God says that the power of the imperial beasts is limited in reach and time, but that the power of the human one is enduring. This power of the human one is incarnated in the true Israel, the people of God, living the Torah, the just orders of God towards life. This is being taken up again in calling Jesus, the Messiah, the “human one”, which means the ultimate incarnation of the human, i.e. God. Jesus himself often refers to this text (cf. e.g. John 1:51).

It is well known that the centre of *Jesus’ life and message* is the Kingdom of God. On the basis of the linkage between God and the humane the term “Kingdom of God” should be translated, “God’s dominion-free human order”.

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It has to be understood in contrast to the repressive structures of this world order:
- The patriarchal order and the suppression of women and children;
- Economic exploitation and the impoverishment of entire classes of human beings and the earth;
- The family as the main instrument, by which children are socialized into submissive roles and values;
- Hierarchical power structures, which favor the strong and disadvantage the weak;
- The reversal of justice by those who, in so doing, defend privileges;
- Racist arrogance and ethnocentrism;
- The entire sacrifice system with its beliefs in holy violence.27

Accordingly, in Matthew 25:31-46 in the parable of the epiphany of Jesus in the poor, all men and women and all peoples shall be judged by whether they helped “the least” of these brothers and sisters to satisfy their basic needs: hunger, thirst, clothing, shelter, health and freedom. Jesus’ entire life, words, actions, as well as his risk to lose his life for the sake of God’s kingdom was to this one end: to liberate the relational humanity in human beings and to help him/her to a breakthrough.

Patristic theology has developed this biblical theology into a great Trinitarian dynamics of relationships as Sigurd Bergmann has shown in his book on ecological liberation theology on the basis of Gregory of Nazianz.28 Gregory lived in the end phase of the Roman Empire under similar conditions like under neo-liberal imperial capitalism today: splitting of society in rich and poor, expansion of trade and money economy, degradation of the soil, dismantling of social coherence, but also growing movements of countervailing power. His response to this context is intriguing. I quote from the summary of Bergmann’s book (p. 364):

"13. Ascribing central significance to the distinction between the three divine hypostases in his overall understanding of God leads Gregory to develop his soteriology in a fashion that includes a more differentiated understanding of the trinitarian economy. For Gregory the unity of the divine essence necessarily derives from the infinite interconnection between the three different parts of the Trinity in the one perfect community of will and power.
14. In Gregory’s understanding of the world, communality comes to expression as good inner-worldly and human relationality understood as a mix, composition, interconnection, and union of all creaturely existence; it comes to expression positively as peace, beauty, and nonviolence, and negatively as any disruption or damage to these relations. In construing the integration of human

beings into creation from both a corporeal and a spiritual perspective, Gregory is actually defining his position topologically-dynamically rather than anthropocentrically. On his view human beings function as God’s image in and for the world; the unity of creation is conceived as continuity, totality, and good order within the world, and the creation community itself is understood as a community of communication.

15. Gregory understands the correspondence between God and the world from the perspective of sociality in three stages: (a) God’s own creative social communication or mediation; (b) the trinitarian movement of the cosmos whose creatures move either toward or away from God; and (c) the liberation of creation from evil as a movement of the triune God and the world."

Hermeneutically, i.e. for unleashing the significance of this biblical and patristic message in relation to the global situation today, it is of high importance to see how originally other cultures and religions responded to the new economy and its ecosocial consequences. When Siddhartha Gautama (*563 v. Chr. in Lumbini; †483 v. Chr.) became Buddha, the same socio-economic conditions had split the North Indian society.29 When he saw poor people and their suffering in this context he felt a deep empathy and left his privileged position as a prince in order to find the way how to overcome this suffering in society. He came to the conclusion that the root cause of this social evil was the greed in human persons. So he came to the conclusion that overcoming this greed by meditation and consequently letting go the superfluous things would at the same time solve the socio-economic problems.30 This approach includes a careful approach to nature, admiring its beauty and caring that no life may be hurt.

Similar was the response of classical Greek philosophy. The first one to present a developed theory was Aristotle (following Plato and Socrates).31 He distinguished two types of economy: one supplies households and the broader community (polis) with the goods needed to satisfy basic needs (oikonomiké). The other is used to increase monetary property for its own sake (kapiliké, buying and selling as part of the artificial form of acquisition, chremastiké). This chremastic economic form, according to Aristotle, arose from the former, natural form of economy since it, too, used money as a means of exchange for vital goods, first in the form of precious metals like silver and gold, and later in the form of coins. As a motive for the origin of the second, "unnatural" form of chremastic economy Aristotle – here, too, linking up with Plato and Socrates – cited human desire (epithymía). The boundless accumulation of money creates the illusion in the individual person of accumulating infinite "means of

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31 Aristotle, Politics, Book 1, Chap. 8-13.
sustenance" and means of pleasure, and thereby living forever.32 That means that the striving for more property, provided by monetary mechanisms, is based on the desire, transcending the individually desired object, for eternal life. Chasing after this illusion the individual destroys community. Aristotle suggests, first, ethical education and, second, political prohibitive laws (i.e. protecting the common good of the polis) as an antidote to this community-destructive way of acting.

So we do have inter-cultural and inter-religious resources for developing a relational paradigm for theological education even from the times of the first type of property and money driven economies. This sheds new light on the theory of what Karl Jaspers called the “axial time”. Of course, he and his followers used this concept in an idealistic way neglecting the social history.33 They just assumed that, around that period, humanity climbed a new step of what they call “transcendental thinking”. Also on the Buddhist side a contemporary wise man like Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of Buddha and Jesus as „brothers”.34 This will help us to develop theological education in an inter-religious and an inter-cultural context.

III. Critical and transformative theological education in the service of life in relationships in a globalized mechanistic world

These biblical and ancient visions are supported by new developments in various sciences, particularly in recent brain research and in relational psychology35 in opposition to modernity. Both from their perspective demonstrate that the original founder of western capitalism’s basic scientific assumptions, René Descartes, was empirically wrong. Brain research shows this by pointing to the necessary interaction between thinking, body, feeling and environment (Damasio).36 More specifically the discovery of “mirror neurons” in our brain suggests that we have been created to feel spontaneously with others (empathy).37 When you cut your finger shedding blood others who see it will automatically feel pain with you. The same applies for our empathy with animals. So it is not true that we are created as isolated individuals competing in a war of all against all.

Relational psychology (in contrast to individualistic, drive-oriented theoretical methods) shows that the human subject emerges from inter-subjectivity, i.e from

32 On the whole question see U. Duchrow, 1995 (19982), 20ff.
the relation between the self and its relating partners. Here we can draw upon the object-relations theory\textsuperscript{38} and especially the trauma psychology,\textsuperscript{39} but also on Eric Fromm.\textsuperscript{40} The object-relations theory in essence stresses that, from infancy onwards, a person is not to be understood as an isolated individual, but rather as a relational being – beginning with the baby-mother relationship. However, instead of the Cartesian language “object-relations” I prefer to use the language of Levinas by saying that the “self” emerges in relation to “others” – the first usually being the child’s mother, his/her first “reference person”. In the course of a child’s further development, the adult partner, however, does not consist of only one person. On the contrary, society at large, groups within society and political and economic institutions also become partners and mobilize early childhood experiences and the psychological patterns of the infant, albeit via his/her experiences of specific persons.

The above perspective can be called that of primary inter-subjectivity, inter-subjectivity referring to the ultimate relatedness of the emerging psychological subject, and with it I am in agreement with Winnicott’s ingenious statement: “There is no such thing as a baby”. In other words, relational psychologists are convinced that one cannot examine a baby without starting from the relational unity of baby-mother. We can speak of the birth of subjectivity only with reference to its emergence from inter-subjectivity; the structural building of the developing personality points to the basic, real experiences in the inter-subjective sphere and the internalization of these experiences. On this basis H.E. Richter develops a way from the “I-society” toward a “we-society”.\textsuperscript{41} Essential to this is the acceptance of one’s own given limits and one’s own death, so that one must not be continuously driven to strive for invulnerability and superior strength.

What I said about relational brain research and relational psychology could be complemented by other sciences. Physics transcended the Newtonian mechanistic approach and the Cartesian subject-object division already a hundred years ago with Einstein’s theory of relativity. Biology has embarked on studying the wonderful dynamics of networking living organisms – even being used as basis for a new economic paradigm (D. Korten).\textsuperscript{42} So even in the West we find the beginnings of a new epistemology and a new cultural paradigm, transcending the male, conquering, violent and destructive approach of capitalist

\textsuperscript{38} This theory was developed by Fairbairn, Winnicott and others and is presented in an historical overview by Greenberg, J.R. & S. Mitchell 1998 (11th ed.). \textit{Object Relations in Psychoanalysis}. Cambridge, MA./ London: Harvard University Press.


\textsuperscript{40} Cf. e.g. Fromm, Erich, 1976, To Have or to Be?, Harper & Row, New York.

\textsuperscript{41} Richter, Horst Eberhard, 2003, Das Ende der Egomanie - Die Krise des westlichen Bewusstseins, Knaur, München.

modernity. In the USA a new school is trying to capture this transdisciplinary new paradigm under the concept of “ecospirituality”.

If we link this with other cultural resources outside the West we may hope for a diversified universal search for a new cultural paradigm. E.g. in 1999 representatives of organizations of indigenous people, NGOs and networks from Asia, Africa and Latin America issued the “Indigenous Peoples' statement on the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of the WTO Agreement” under the title “No to patenting of Life!” Here we read among others:

“We, indigenous peoples from around the world, believe that nobody can own what exists in nature except nature herself. A human being cannot own its own mother. Humankind is part of Mother Nature, we have created nothing and so we can in no way claim to be owners of what does not belong to us. But time and again, western legal property regimes have been imposed on us, contradicting our own cosmologies and values”. Consequently they demand: “Allow for the right of indigenous peoples and farmers to continue their traditional practices of saving, sharing, and exchanging seeds; and harvesting, cultivating, and using medicinal plants…”

This shows that relationality is not only fundamental to human relations but to the whole oikos of creation. It is exactly this view that was worked out in the WCC-CWM ChangSeong Consultation, quoted in the beginning. Referring to Ubuntu and Sangsaeng the report states:

“Ubuntu is an expression of human relations lived in community and in harmony with the whole of creation (‘African anthropology and cosmo-vision lived in community’). Sangsaeng is an ancient Asian concept ‘of a sharing community and economy which allows all to flourish together’.

In the shifting demography of Christianity, with Christians from the South now forming the majority, Christians are presented with the privilege and responsibility to formulate an alternative expression of Christian faith constructed around:

- new ways of relating
- openness to theological expressions rooted in the cultures of the South, and
- an agenda which reflects the issues and concerns of the peoples of the South
- a commitment to building bridges of understanding and hope, and deepening relationships between North and South...

In presentations and discussion we learnt of Ubuntu and Sangsaeng as exemplifying African and Asian paradigms of life-giving forces that call us into harmony with one another and with God’s creation. Resonating with the biblical concept of koinonia, we received Ubuntu and Sangsaeng as necessary resources

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43 Kearnes, Laurel/Keller, Catherine (Hg.), 2007, Ecospirit. Religions and Philosophies for the Earth, Fordham University Press, New York.
for the struggle with the critical issues of theology, civilization and ecumenism in the 21st century…

The convergence of Ubuntu and Sangsaeng highlights the conviviality and relationality of all God’s creation, while offering a possibility of reflecting, analyzing and protecting life based on the Ubuntu principle ‘I am because you are, you are because I am’. Both these principles are about the eradication of hate, anger, private wealth without sharing, oppression, exploitation as well as harmony and peace with the cosmos.

With these words the participants of that consultation challenge us to transform our theology towards a life-giving civilization.

So analogous to the ancient times, called “axial time”, we have a growing inter-cultural and inter-religious convergence today against a disembedded economy splitting society into rich and poor and destroying nature by stimulating individual competition towards accumulation of wealth and power. Besides these convergences between Jewish, Christian, Buddhist as well as African, Asian and indigenous traditions we could also mention Islam and some traditions in Hinduism (as e.g. revived by Gandhi). This could also be seen in the Colloquium 2000 organized by Kairos Europa in cooperation with an ecumenical alliance in Germany and WARC and the WCC at the international level.45 We were particularly intrigued by the fact that there are networks in Buddhism and Islam specifically engaging in social and ecological justice work.46

Of course, all spiritual and psychological healing, liberation and mobilization does not help the larger society and the earth if there were not real possibilities of economic and political, life enhancing alternatives. In this context a few hints must suffice. In Kairos Europa we speak of a multiple strategy necessary for really transforming the political economy:

- In order to withdraw energy from the system we need to first de-legitimize it by confronting the ideology with reality and secondly defy and resist concretely certain structures and policies. This is possible because the capitalist imperial globalization is full of contradictions and leads to ever more dangerous crises.
- In order to nurture life we can develop ecosocial economies in solidarity locally and regionally as well as build broad alliances in civil society for macro-economic and macro-political changes including a new property

46 Cf. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists; the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN)/Thailand; the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism/India etc. See also: Thich Nhat Hanh, Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism: Precepts for Everyday Living, Parallax, 1998.
order from below. Key starting points for this approach are the overcoming of agro-business by life-giving agriculture and the defense of public goods and services for the satisfaction of basic needs of all – against the hurricane of privatization. The recent changes in Latin American governments suggest that, after serious and persistent work of social and ecumenical movements also political institutions can be changed to serve the people.

**IV. Conclusions for theological education**

What are the concrete conclusions for theological education from the preceding context analysis, the trans-disciplinary, inter-cultural and inter-religious resources for judging and the concrete socio-economic alternatives for transforming the system in the service of the life of all creation? Let me put my findings in the form of theses.

**Thesis 1**

In a situation of notorious asymmetry within the global power system the place of church, theology and theological education is *at the side of the losers – people and nature*. This means that theological education has to start with the praxis of theological students in concrete struggles for life – e.g. in ecological agriculture, as Park, Seong-Won is trying in Korea, or in initiatives for ecosocial economies of solidarity, as Marcos Arruda is working for in Brasil and movements in all continents have embarked on. It is there where theological education can help to meet the triune God of the Bible – the God of Israel, the liberating messiah, and the inspiration of relational faithfulness – who asks us to co-operate in God’s healing and liberating work towards justice, peace and life.

**Thesis 2**

As the system of neo-liberal globalization is absolutizing the capitalist market and the political, scientific-technological power in the form of “empire with imperialism”, it has not only to be constantly and concretely analyzed but also to be rejected and resisted as a matter of faith. Here, the status confessionis has to be claimed beyond lethal economic systems and weapons of mass destruction in order to include the dramatic ecological crisis. Theological education, therefore,

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50 Cf. [http://www.kairoseuropa.de/fix/0610-DokuMA.pdf](http://www.kairoseuropa.de/fix/0610-DokuMA.pdf), p.3ff. Thanks to him also for suggestions enriching this paper.

has not only to be engaged in developing a new epistemology and praxis for ecosocial analysis with transdisciplinary methods but also in ideology critique.

**Thesis 3**
As the system is instrumentalizing religion and spiritualities in order to legitimize the asymmetry of power (empire) and wealth (fetishism of capital) theological education has to be a protagonist of the critique of religion, starting with self-critique.

**Thesis 4**
In order to realize the power of our biblical traditions for responding to the life-endangering imperial capitalist globalization it is imperative to re-read them with contextual, interdisciplinary methods. Helping the people of God and particularly the theological students to understand how the Bible responds to the first form of property based market economies and empires is an essential task of theological education. In view of the inter-cultural and inter-religious situation in most countries today it is also of high importance to understand how other religions, philosophies and wisdoms then and now responded and respond to their specific contexts. Here we need to strengthen the cooperation between theology, history of religion and cultural studies.

**Thesis 5**
As the dominating system is built on the competition of individuals and groups for maximum wealth and power, theological education should make the concept and praxis of “relationality” or “persons in community” in all dimensions including the cosmos on the basis of Trinitarian theology its focal point. In terms of praxis this is already being done in the diversified forms of theological education by extension because people are not taken out of their communities while studying theology. But in order to unfold the theoretical and theological implications of relationality we also need a transdisciplinary, inter-cultural and inter-religious approach.

**Thesis 6**
In order to experience and later to teach the biblical message that “Another World is Possible” those involved in theological education should simultaneously be actively involved in social, peace and/or ecological movements. This may take place at the local and regional and/or at the national and international alliance-building level. Here, the ongoing ecumenical processes of the last decade are extremely helpful: the processus confessionis regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction initiating the processes of “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth” and Oikotree – putting justice at the heart of faith,\(^{52}\) the AGAPE (Alternative Globalization

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Addressing People and Earth) process, after 2006 including studies on “Poverty, Wealth, Ecology” (PWE) and “Ecological Debt” as well as linking up with the “Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence” (DOV).

Given the fact that many of our mainline churches still suffer from assimilation to the individualism and imperialism of modern, bourgeois capitalist societies, a relational theological education along these lines would not only strengthen the healing and liberating forces in our endangered world, groaning in birth pain for a new life. It would also help in bringing back the churches to their biblical roots and, on that basis, cooperating in God’s work in all faith communities and ecosocial movements. It would contribute greatly towards building a new domination free, life-giving order with a human face.

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