

Economy of Life

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Linking Poverty, Wealth and Ecology

Edited by

Rogate R. Mshana and Athena Peralta

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Preface

This book is a harvest of the ecumenical work done to advance economic, social and ecological justice since the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Porto Alegre till the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan. It outlines the milestones in the journey leading up to the Bogor Statement on “Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All,” also included in this volume. Let me outline what our mission was all about as part of the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) process focusing on poverty, wealth and ecology and their linkages.

The mission of the ecumenical movement today is about transforming the world into a place of justice and peace for all of God’s creation. This understanding of mission has led to the theme of the 10th WCC Assembly, “God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace.” The AGAPE process, which was an attempt by the ecumenical movement to define this way of mission, triggered a challenging debate among churches on what it means to be church today. On the other hand, it is also a debate about encouraging churches to put this issue at the centre of their mission and to point to alternatives to the current globalization of death.

The AGAPE process was launched at the 8th WCC Assembly in Harare, in 1998, with the question: “How do we live our faith in the context of globalization?” This question, which is central to Christian faith, will continue to be raised as long as a major part of humanity and the Earth suffer. The WCC’s motto of preferential option for people in poverty remains relevant today. The initial phase of economic globalization was a period of euphoria with an assumption that salvation had come to humankind – a corporate globalized market was expected to eradicate poverty and bring prosperity for all. From the very beginning of this process, the WCC had made a clear distinction between globalization as a multi-faceted historic process and the present form of a pernicious economic and political project of global capitalism. The latter form of globalization is based on an ideology that groups and movements involved in the World Social Forum have described as “neoliberalism.” The distinction between the two understandings of globalization was

introduced by the Copenhagen Seminars for Social Progress.¹ The 8th WCC Assembly gave the mandate for a study on economic globalization. The results of this study process were disturbing.

At the 9th WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre, in 2006, an AGAPE Call was presented calling churches to action, urging them to work against economic injustice inherent in globalization. This call was issued at a time when the unfettered market took on virtually the image of god and when the role of governments to enforce regulations to protect public goods was severely weakened. Commerce and finance began to rule over politics, and governments were driven by corporate interests instead of peoples' needs. Financial markets were deregulated. Poor people and their nations were mercilessly left to the vagaries of the market. "Do not worry, the free market will bring prosperity for all" was the common mantra and remains so till today. Yet in 2008, we experienced the incredibly destructive impacts of neoliberal policies during the global financial crisis, from which the world has not recovered yet. The globalization of poverty and inequality has increased threats to peace.

Questioning globalization and seeking alternatives with the churches playing a central role is what the AGAPE process is about. This process is based on the understanding that reflection and action must continue by faithfully linking poverty, wealth and ecology as a concrete way of addressing economic, social and ecological injustice. Together with the covenanting for justice process of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, now called World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the AGAPE process has given birth to the Oikotree movement which is encouraging ecumenical movements to focus on putting justice at the heart of faith.

It is evident that individual churches cannot effectively work against economic injustice in the current frame of globalization. They need to work ecumenically and with social movements as a new way of contributing to a fresh understanding of ecumenism today.

¹Jacques Baudot, ed. (2000), *Building a World Community. Globalization and the Common Good*, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Copenhagen.

One of the main concerns about globalization is almost certainly the public feeling, supported by empirical evidence, that the gaps between rich and the poor among and within countries are widening. Yet another concern is the merciless mutilation of the Earth in the search of profits such that the productive and regenerative limits of the planet have now been overstepped. This scenario will not change if churches stop raising their voices against the dominant capitalist economic model. Church campaigns on debt cancellation for poor countries, fair trade, climate change mitigation and adaptation, making poverty history, and promoting the right to food are signs of hope. But these should not bring contentment to church workers and the ecumenical movement. Often such an approach assumes that the problems globalization generates are problems for the South. This is not true – the 2008 global financial and economic crash and the reality of climate change highlight our common vulnerability as a human and ecological community. Churches should not confine themselves to designing projects that will help poor people in the South. Nor should they believe that capitalism as an economic system is beyond interrogation.

Regrettably, some churches have fallen in line with corporate thinking and are also using the language of money and markets. While some might be excited to speak for instance about aid effectiveness, others should raise the question as to why there is a need for aid in the first place. A rice farmer whose livelihood is destroyed because of the influx of imported and subsidized rice from the U.S. or a public health facility that has scaled down as a result of government budget cuts may need aid in the short run to survive. But the fundamental issues to be tackled are injustices in global trade and financial systems including relentless capital flight from poor to rich countries.

What is needed is for churches to work for global justice by critically and prophetically addressing capitalism, which, despite numerous mutations, cannot eradicate poverty, inequality and ecological destruction. This conclusion was reached by many of the study processes and consultations on poverty, wealth and ecology involving more than 500 participants, including church representatives, women, youth, Indigenous People and theologians, organized from 2007 to 2013 by the WCC Poverty, Wealth and Ecology (PWE) project. The answer lies in a

participatory search for alternatives that are centred on the people and the Earth.

The various activities under the PWE project on critiquing the role of the European Union, United States and China in Africa, on recognizing ecological debt and developing forms of reparation, on elaborating a greed line and multidimensional indicators of greed, on transforming the international financial architecture, etc., have been attempts to bring to the fore areas that require further work and follow ups. Since the 9th WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre, we have come far as churches in terms of arriving at a more common understanding and shared stance on globalization, especially as some of us were severely affected by the 2008 global financial crisis. The statement on “Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All”² coming from the Global Forum on PWE held in Bogor, Indonesia in 2012, summarizes this journey and is a contribution to the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace, which is expected to be launched after the 10th Assembly in Busan.

It is our hope that this document will serve as a landmark of where churches stand in the work on promoting an Economy of Life and in the search for alternatives to the current paradigm of capitalism. Continuing inequities in the global distribution of resources and in the workings of trade and financial systems as well as unlimited and unsustainable production and consumption are the root-causes of the intertwined socioeconomic and ecological crises we face today. This great agenda must be at the ecumenical table as part of the mission for public witness and service of the WCC. The WCC must consistently raise issues of global justice because no one else will do so at the prophetic level and from the understanding that these lie at the very heart of our faith.

² The statements mentioned in the preface and the acknowledgements can all be found in the bibliography of this report. The statements “Just Finance and the Economy of Life,” “Eco-Justice and Ecological Debt,” and “International Financial Transformation for an Economy of Life” are also included as appendices in this volume.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we express our gratitude to partners who resourced the PWE project in a large scale, namely: the United Church of Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden, World Mission and the Mennonite Church in the Netherlands. A special thanks to ICCO and Bread for the World, who enabled us to convene the WCC Advisory Group on Economic Matters (AGEM) to discuss the financial crisis, resulting in the publication entitled Justice Not Greed.

The work in this field was staffed by one person based at the WCC headquarters in Geneva with 35 percent administrative support and a consultant based in Manila. A big ‘thank you’ must be extended to Sophie Dhanjal and Alexandra Pomezny for their indefatigable assistance and efficient administration of the project. Moreover, it would have been difficult if not impossible to have accomplished the same quantity and quality of work if not for our consultant working from the Philippines, Athena Peralta, to whom we register our appreciation.

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by Jan Pronk), the Ecological Debt Group (especially Joy Kennedy, William Stanley, Malcolm Damon and Aurora Donoso), and the Greed Line Study Group (led by Konrad Raiser, former WCC General Secretary). These working groups were central to the formulation of the WCC central committee statements on “Just Finance and the Economy of Life” and “Eco-Justice and Ecological Debt.” We are also grateful to the WCC central committee which issued these statements.

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Finally, we would like to show our appreciation to the WCRC, the Council for World Mission (CWM) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). We partnered with the LWF to discuss interfaith perspectives on how to overcome greed. Together with the WCRC and the CWM, we initiated the Oikotree movement and came up with the São Paulo statement on “International Financial Transformation for an Economy of Life.” Working ecumenically has been inspiring and rewarding. May this way of working be sustained.

In summary, many people and institutions offered a hand in bringing the WCC’s critical work on advancing justice in the economy and the Earth to a level that is satisfying. We are most thankful for their contributions.

Dr Rogate R. Mshana

Economy of Life

As a follow-up to the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) process, which concluded with the AGAPE Call presented at the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Porto Alegre in 2006, the WCC initiated a programme focused on eradicating poverty, challenging wealth accumulation and safeguarding ecological integrity based on the understanding that Poverty, Wealth and Ecology (PWE) are integrally related. The PWE programme engaged in on-going dialogue between religious, economic and political actors. Participants included ecumenical leaders, representatives and leaders of churches from all over the world, interfaith partners, leaders of government and social service organizations, and it represented a rich variety of the world's regions and nations. Regional studies and consultations took place in Africa (Dar es Salaam) in 2007, Latin America and the Caribbean (Guatemala City) in 2008, Asia and the Pacific (Chiang Mai) in 2009, Europe (Budapest) in 2010 and North America (Calgary) in 2011. The programme culminated in a Global Forum and AGAPE celebration in Bogor, Indonesia in 2012. The call to action that follows is the result of a six-year process of consultations and regional studies linking poverty, wealth and ecology.

Preamble

1. This call to action comes in a time of dire necessity. People and the Earth are in peril due to the over-consumption of some, growing inequalities as evidenced in the persistent poverty of many in contrast to the extravagant wealth of a few, and intertwined global financial, socio-economic, ecological and climate crises. Throughout our dialogue, we as participants in consultations and regional studies expressed differing, sometimes even contrasting, perspectives. We also grew to share a common consciousness that life in the global community as we know it today will come to an end if we fail to confront the sins of egotism, callous disregard and greed which lie at the root of these crises. With a sense of urgency, we bring this dialogue to the churches as a call to action. This urgency is born of our profound hope and belief: An Economy of Life is not only possible, it is in the making—and God's justice lies at its very foundation!

Theological and Spiritual Affirmations of Life

2. The belief that God created human beings as part of a larger web of life and affirmed the goodness of the whole creation (Genesis 1) lies at the heart of biblical faith. The whole community of living organisms that grows and flourishes is an expression of God's will and works together to bring life from and give life to the land, to connect one generation to the next, and to sustain the abundance and diversity of God's household (*oikos*). Economy in God's household emerges from God's gracious offering of abundant life for *all* (John 10:10). We are inspired by Indigenous Peoples' image of "Land is Life" (*Macliing Dulag*) which recognizes that the lives of people and the land are woven together in mutual interdependence. Thus, we express our belief that the "creation's life and God's life are intertwined" (Commission on World Mission and Evangelism) and that God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).
3. Christian and many other expressions of spirituality teach us that the "good life" lies not in the competitive quest for possessions, the accumulation of wealth, fortresses and stockpiles of armaments to provide for our security, or in using our own power to lord it over others (James 3: 13-18). We affirm the "good life" (*Sumak Kausay* in the Kichua language and the concept of *Waniambi a Tobati Engros* from West Papua) modeled by the communion of the Trinity in mutuality, shared partnership, reciprocity, justice and loving-kindness.
4. The groaning of the Creation and the cries of people in poverty (Jeremiah 14:2-7) alert us to just how much our current social, political, economic and ecological state of emergency runs counter to God's vision for life in abundance. Many of us too easily deceive ourselves into thinking that human desires stand at the centre of God's universe. We construct divisions, barriers and boundaries to distance ourselves from neighbour, nature and God's justice. Communities are fragmented and relationships broken. Our greed and self-centredness endanger both people and planet Earth.

5. We are called to turn away from works that bring death and to be transformed into a new life (*metanoia*). Jesus calls humanity to repent of our sins of greed and egotism, to renew our relationships with the others and creation, to restore the image of God, and to begin a new way of life as a partner of God's life-affirming mission. The call of the prophets is heard anew from and through people submerged in poverty by our current economic system and those most affected by climate change: Do justice and bring a new Earth into being!
6. Our vision of justice is rooted in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ who drove money changers from the temple (Matthew 21:12), made the weak strong and strong weak (1 Corinthians 1:25-28), and redefined views of poverty and wealth (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus identified himself with the marginalized and excluded people not only out of compassion, but because their lives testified to the sinfulness of the systems and structures. Our faith compels us to seek justice, to witness to the presence of God and to be part of the lives and struggles of people made weak and vulnerable by structures and cultures—women, children, people living in poverty in both urban and rural areas, Indigenous Peoples, racially oppressed communities, people with disabilities, Dalits, forced migrant workers, refugees and religious ethnic minorities. Jesus says "Whatever you did to the least of these you did to me" (Matthew 25: 40).
7. We must embody a "transformative spirituality" (Commission on World Mission and Evangelism) that re-connects us to others (*Ubuntu* and *Sansaeng*), motivates us to serve the common good, emboldens us to stand against all forms of marginalization, seeks the redemption of the whole Earth, resists life-destroying values and inspires us to discover innovative alternatives. This spirituality provides the means to discover the grace to be satisfied with enough, while sharing with any who have need (Acts 4: 35).
8. Churches must be challenged to remember, hear and heed Christ's call today: "The time has come ... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). We are called to

be transformed, to continue Christ's acts of healing and reconciliation and "to be what [we] have been sent to be—a people of God and a community in the world" (Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology in Africa). Therefore, the Church is God's agent for transformation. The Church is a community of disciples of Jesus Christ, who affirms the fullness of life for all, against any denial of life.

Intertwined and Urgent Crises

9. Our present stark global reality is so fraught with death and destruction that we will not have a future to speak of unless the prevailing development paradigm is radically transformed and justice and sustainability become the driving force for the economy, society and the Earth. Time is running out.
10. We discern the fatal intertwining of the global financial, socio-economic, climate, and ecological crises accompanied in many places of the world by the suffering of people and their struggle for life. Far-reaching market liberalization, deregulation and unrestrained privatization of goods and services are exploiting the whole Creation and dismantling social programmes and services and opening up economies across borders to seemingly limitless growth of production. Uncontrolled financial flows destabilize the economies of an increasing number of countries all over the world. Various aspects of climate, ecological, financial and debt crises are mutually dependent and reinforce each other. They cannot be treated separately anymore.
11. Climate change and threats to the integrity of creation have become the significant challenge of the multifaceted crises that we have to confront. Climate change directly impacts peoples' livelihoods, endangers the existence of small island states, reduces the availability of fresh water and diminishes Earth's biodiversity. It has far-reaching impacts on food security, the health of people and the living habits of growing part of population. Due to climate change, life in its many forms as we know it can be irreversibly changed within the span of a few decades. Climate change leads to the displacement of people, to the increase of forced climate

migration, and to armed conflicts. Unprecedented challenges of climate change go hand-in-hand with the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and leads to the destruction of the Earth and to a substantial change of the habitat. Global warming and ecological destruction become more and more a question of life or death.

12. Our world has never been more prosperous, and, at the same time, more inequitable than it is today. Inequality has reached a level that we can no longer afford to ignore. People who have been submerged into poverty, driven into overwhelming debt, marginalized, and displaced are crying out with a greater sense of urgency and clarity than ever before. The global community must recognize the need for all of us to join hands together and to do justice in the face of unparalleled and catastrophic inequalities in the distribution of wealth.
13. Greed and injustice, seeking easy profit, unjust privileges and short-term advantages at the expense of long term and sustainable aims are root causes of the intertwined crises and cannot be overlooked. These life-destroying values have slowly crept in to dominate today's structures and lead to lifestyles that fundamentally defy the regenerative limits of the Earth and the rights of human beings and other forms of life. Therefore, the crisis has deep moral and existential dimensions. The challenges that are posed are not first and foremost technological and financial, but ethical and spiritual.
14. Market fundamentalism is more than an economic paradigm: it is a social and moral philosophy. During the last thirty years, market faith based on unbridled competition and expressed by calculating and monetizing all aspects of life has overwhelmed and determined the direction of our systems of knowledge, science, technology, public opinion, media and even education. This dominating approach has funneled wealth primarily toward those who are already rich and allowed humans to plunder resources of the natural world far beyond its limits to increase their own wealth. The neoliberal paradigm lacks the self-regulating mechanisms to

deal with the chaos it creates with far-reaching impacts, especially for the impoverished and marginalized.

15. This ideology is permeating all features of life, destroying it from the inside as well as from the outside, as it seeps into the lives of families and local communities, wreaks havoc upon the natural environment and traditional life-forms and cultures, and spoils the future of the Earth. The dominant global economic system in this way threatens to put an end to both the conditions for peaceful coexistence and life as we know it.
16. The one-sided belief that social benefits automatically follow from economic (GDP) growth is misguided. Economic growth without constraints strangles the flourishing of our own natural habitat: climate change, deforestation, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss and so on. The ecological commons have been degraded and appropriated, through the use of military force, by the political and economic elite. Over-consumption based on the costs of uncovered debts generates massive social and ecological indebtedness, which are owed by the developed countries of global North to the global South, as well as indebtedness over against the Earth, is unjust and creates enormous pressure on future generations. The notion that the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24: 1; 1 Corinthians 10: 26) has been dismissed.

Well-Springs of Justice

17. We confess that churches and church members are complicit in the unjust system when they partake in unsustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption and remain entangled in the economy of greed. There are churches who continue to preach theologies of prosperity, self-righteousness, domination, individualism and convenience. Some support theologies of charity rather than justice for the impoverished. Others fail to question and even legitimize systems and ideologies founded on unlimited growth and accumulation, and ignore the reality of ecological destruction and the plights of victims of globalization. Some focus on short-term, quantifiable results at the expense of deep-seated, qualitative changes. However, we are also aware that even when many fail to

examine and change their own production, consumption and investment behaviour, an increasing number of churches from all continents are stepping up their efforts and expressing their belief that transformation is possible.

18. Ultimately, our hope springs from Christ's resurrection and promise of life for all. We see evidence of that resurrection hope in the churches and movements committed to making a better world. They are the light and salt of the Earth. We are profoundly inspired by numerous examples of transformation from within the family of churches and in growing movements of women, people in poverty, youth, people with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples who are building an Economy of Life and promoting a flourishing ecology.
19. People of faith, Christian, Muslim and Indigenous leaders in the Philippines, have given their lives to maintain their connection to and to continue to sustain themselves from the land to which they belong. Churches in South America, Africa and Asia are conducting audits of external debts and challenging mining and resource-extractive companies to be accountable for human rights violations and environmental damages. Churches in Latin America and Europe are sharing and learning from differing experiences with globalization and working toward defining common but differentiated responsibilities, building solidarity and strategic alliances. Christians are defining indicators of greed and conducting intentional dialogues with Buddhists and Muslims which discover common ground in the fight against greed. Churches in partnership with civil society are engaged in discussing the parameters of a new international financial and economic architecture, promoting life-giving agriculture and building economies of solidarity.
20. Women have been developing feminist theologies that challenge patriarchal systems of domination as well as feminist economics that embed the economy in society and society in ecology. Youth are in the forefront of campaigns for simple living and alternative lifestyles. Indigenous Peoples are making demands for holistic

reparations and the recognition of Earth rights to address social and ecological debt.

Commitments and Call

21. The 10th Assembly of the WCC is meeting at a time when the vibrant life of God's whole creation may be extinguished by human methods of wealth creation. God calls us to a radical transformation. Transformation will not be without sacrifice and risk, but our faith in Christ demands that we commit ourselves to be transformative churches and transformative congregations. We must cultivate the moral courage necessary to witness to a spirituality of justice and sustainability, and build a prophetic movement for an Economy of Life for all. This entails mobilizing people and communities, providing the required resources (funds, time and capacities), and developing more cohesive and coordinated programmes geared toward transforming economic systems, production, distribution, and consumption patterns, cultures and values.
22. The process of transformation must uphold human rights, human dignity and human accountability to all of God's creation. We have a responsibility that lies beyond our individual selves and national interests to create sustainable structures that will allow future generations to have enough. Transformation must embrace those who suffer the most from systemic marginalization, such as people in poverty, women, Indigenous Peoples and persons living with disabilities. Nothing determined without them is for them. We must challenge ourselves and overcome structures and cultures of domination and self-destruction that are rending the social and ecological fabric of life. Transformation must be guided by the mission to heal and renew the whole creation.
23. Therefore, we call on the 10th Assembly in Busan to commit to strengthening the role of the WCC in convening churches, building a common voice, fostering ecumenical cooperation and ensuring greater coherence for the realization of an Economy of Life for all. In particular, the critical work on building a new international financial and economic architecture (WCC Statement

on Just Finance and an Economy of Life), challenging wealth accumulation and systemic greed and promoting anti-greed measures (Report of the Greed Line Study Group), redressing ecological debt and advancing eco-justice (WCC Statement on Eco-justice and Ecological Debt) must be prioritized and further deepened in the coming years.

24. We further call on the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan to set aside a period of time between now and the next Assembly for churches to focus on faith commitments to an “Economy of Life – Living for God’s Justice in Creation [Justice and Peace for All].” The process will enable the fellowship of churches to derive fortitude and hope from each other, strengthen unity and deepen common witness on critical issues that lie at the very core of our faith.
25. The statement on “Just Finance and an Economy of Life” calls for an ethical, just and democratic international financial regime “grounded on a framework of common values: honesty, social justice, human dignity, mutual accountability and ecological sustainability” (WCC Statement on Just Finance and an Economy of Life). We can and must shape an Economy of Life that engenders participation for all in decision-making processes that impact lives, provides for people’s basic needs through just livelihoods, values and supports social reproduction and care work done primarily by women, and protects and preserves the air, water, land, and energy sources that are necessary to sustain life (Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology in Asia and the Pacific). The realization of an Economy of Life will entail a range of strategies and methodologies, including, but not limited to: critical self-reflection and radical spiritual renewal; rights-based approaches; the creation and multiplication of spaces for the voices of the marginalized to be heard in as many arenas as possible; open dialogue between global North and global South, between churches, civil society and state actors, and among various disciplines and world faiths to build synergies for resistance to structures and cultures that deny life in dignity for many; taxation justice; and the organization of a broad platform for common witness and advocacy.

26. The process is envisioned as a flourishing space where churches can learn from each other and from other faith traditions and social movements about how a transformative spirituality can counter and resist life-destroying values and overcome complicity in the economy of greed. It will be a space to learn what an Economy of Life means, theologically and practically, by reflecting together and sharing what concrete changes are needed in various contexts. It will be a space to develop joint campaigns and advocacy activities at the national, regional and global levels with a view to enabling policy and systemic changes leading to poverty eradication and wealth redistribution; ecologically-respectful production, consumption and distribution; and to develop healthy, equitable, post-fossil fuel and peace-loving societies.

God of Life calls us to justice and peace.

Come to God's table of sharing!

Come to God's table of life!

Come to God's table of love!