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Editor: Páraic Réamonn

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Introduction

Setri Nyomi

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”
(Lk 4.18-19)

The theme of the 24th general council (Accra 2004), “That All may have Life in Fullness”, has been a rallying point as we look back at the work of the Alliance over the last seven years and prepare for new directions in the years that lie ahead. It has been particularly helpful in focusing two themes that have figured prominently in the life of the Alliance since the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997): the study on mission and the process of covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth. In this issue of *Reformed World*, the mission study planning group and the covenanting taskforce report on their work so far.

The policy of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches is set by its member churches assembled in general council. These texts on mission and covenanting are offered to our churches and their delegates, as well as to other readers and Accra participants, as food for thought, part of the preparatory materials for our Accra discussions.

Together in mission

What is offered in these pages regarding the mission study is a summary of where we are today. The regional mission consultations have shown that our churches are ready to learn from one another in identifying new directions at the cutting edge of mission today – directions that take our different social and cultural contexts very seriously. Our resolve to do mission in Christ’s way – to bring good news to all, especially the poor and the downtrodden, in the power of the Holy Spirit’s anointing – is meaningful only when we understand God’s mission as people-centred and not merely church-centred.

The mission study began in 2001 and has just completed its first phase. It is not a final stopping point. To the contrary, it invites us to raise new questions and engage together in new reflections on our mission. From the beginning, however, it has been linked with the longer process of covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth that was initiated in Debrecen.

Covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth

The 23rd general council recognized that economic injustice worldwide – in particular the impoverishment inflicted on the global south – and the massive

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and growing destruction of our environment were closely linked and together threaten us all. It called WARC member churches to a *processus confessionis*: progressive recognition, education and confession regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction.

In this *Reformed World* the taskforce that has guided the covenanting for justice process reports on the work done by the Alliance and its member churches since 1997. The reports from the Buenos Aires and London Colney forums show what representatives of some Alliance churches in the south and north have been able to say together in response to the Debrecen call.

As we prepare ourselves for Accra and for new levels of being called together into confession, commitment and common action against the “bad news” that spells suffering and injustice for a large part of the world, and for many in our own constituency, we are invited to reflect on these texts and to consider what God is calling us to be and do today. This is at heart a spiritual exercise – not just an economic, environmental or political analysis. Our reflections on our world and our reactions to these texts can be key building blocks for what we say together in Accra as we seek to break chains of injustice and mediate life in fullness for all.

In both our mission study and covenanting for justice process, the Alliance family is challenged to do mission in Christ’s way. I invite all our churches in the run-up to the general council to reflect on these texts and to respond to them, both in writing to our secretariat and through what their delegates say and do in Accra, so that together we may take real, practical steps forward. It is my hope and prayer that these reports will be sources of renewal as we commit ourselves to new levels of engagement in the mission to which we have been called.

Together in mission

Together in mission

A letter on mission renewal
addressed to all member churches
of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches
and to all women and men from churches around the world
who are gathering in Accra, Ghana, in July–August 2004

Dear sisters and brothers,

Grace to you, and peace in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.

We rejoice and give thanks

We give thanks to God, who in the mystery of creation and redemption has freely and graciously entered into covenant with the whole earth community. We give thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ, who has called us to be partners in God's mission, co-workers in the *missio dei* (1 Cor 3.9), and has sent us forth in the power of the Spirit to be witnesses to the whole inhabited earth (Acts 1.8) of God's present and coming reign.

We give thanks for the past and present witness of the churches of the Reformed and reforming tradition, who, in fellowship with the wider ecumenical family, are seeking to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation and salvation, justice and peace, healing and wholeness, in word and deed. We particularly give thanks for women, who have played a significant but often unacknowledged role in the mission of our churches.

We rejoice in the ways in which our churches in different regions of the world are seeking to witness to the gospel today. In Africa, for their vitality that brings out the liberating power of the gospel among the poorest people in the world. In the Caribbean, for their call to witness in multicultural settings. In Latin America, for their zeal for our confessional heritage and for equipping the saints for mission (Eph 4.12). In the Middle East, for their commitment to witness, evangelism and Christian unity. In Asia, the home of world religions, for the beginnings of a people-centred and life-centred approach to Christian mission open to the insights of Asian wisdom. In the Pacific, for the churches' voices of solidarity with aboriginal communities and of concern for environmental justice. In North America, for their willingness to rediscover mission in their own society. In Europe, for their concern for new forms of Christian presence in the public arena in highly "secularized" settings.

We affirm all these efforts as part of the living witness of our churches in building up the household of God (1 Pet 2.4ff), in fellowship with other churches throughout the whole world.

Searching together for mission renewal

As we listen to what the Spirit is saying to our churches and try to discern its meaning for our life and work as a church fellowship, we are not only inspired but also challenged. We look not to the past, but to the future, so that we may “run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12.1-2).

In 2002, the Alliance launched a new study on mission.

The goal of this study is “not just a statement on mission but the renewal of our churches for a fresh understanding and engagement in mission”. It is designed to pay attention to recent developments in the study of mission, but more importantly, to “the lived missiology of the people of God in the contemporary world” – to what our churches are actually saying and doing in mission.

What we need, we believe, “is a focus on mission that will produce fresh missiological thinking and energy in response to the new contexts in which Reformed churches find themselves at the beginning of the 21st century”.¹

The first step in the study was a preparatory meeting in Geneva in July 2001. In June 2002 and October-December 2003, a series of regional consultations was held in São Paulo (Brazil), Beirut (Lebanon), Yaoundé (Cameroon), Bali (Indonesia) and Georgetown (Guyana). In addition, contributions were made by the mission in unity project jointly sponsored by the Alliance and the John Knox International Reformed Centre, and by recent consultations on women in mission and missiology.

The mission study is an important part of the journey of our fellowship to Accra and beyond. It seeks to respond to the call of the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997) to member churches to recognize, educate and confess their faith with regard to economic injustice and environmental destruction. It is part of the worldwide process of gathering around Christ’s promise of life in fullness for all.

Listening to the Spirit through mutual learning

What we have learned so far in this mission study leads us to underline the importance of interregional sharing and interregional action in mission. Such interregional exchanges imply a sharing of gifts, mutual learning, and intercontextuality in mission. They require a reconsideration of unequal power relationships in mission (2 Cor 8), and the rejection of a vertical, top-down approach, with far-reaching implications for our life in the *oikoumene*.

Our churches raise questions of identity in their practice of mission. Identity is something that both grounds us and holds us back. It is not enough to make a statement summarizing past wisdom, in continuity with an outdated mission tradition. Mission means risking our identity for the sake of the gospel, losing and saving our life in order to discover, once more, who God is calling us to be.

Some churches speak of a crisis in Christian mission. In many quarters, ecumenical missiology is questioned, and dubious older missiologies have been revived. Our mission practice is fragmented, and there are gross inconsistencies between what we say and what we do.

If the gospel is to be heard as “good news” by the peoples of the world, then we need a missiology that is not church-centred but people- and life-centred. The need for such a “paradigm shift” is reflected in the following perspectives on mission that have emerged from our study so far.

The renewal of mission requires the discipline of repentance

The renewal of our mission as the people of God among all God’s peoples requires the discipline of repentance and confession.

This is why we have linked our mission study to the process of covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth that began in Debreccen. In order to bear witness to what is good and acceptable and perfect in a world of growing economic injustice and environmental destruction, we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds and not conform ourselves to the present order (Rom 12.2).

Mission has often been understood and practised as a current flowing only in a single direction: from north to south, from rich to poor, from the powerful to the powerless, from male to female, from white to black, from “Christian” civilization to godless cultures. This reduces mission to something that some people do to others, rather than a common sharing in God’s mission of love for the whole world.

Mission has often been understood and practised in oppressive and even militaristic ways. In many contexts, Christian mission is seen as the religious face of western colonial and neocolonial domination. This perception is strengthened when the language of the gospel is abused to legitimate immoral and illegal wars against societies that are predominantly Muslim.

Mission has often been understood and practised in a narrow, impoverished manner. Sometimes by overspiritualizing salvation, to the neglect of systemic threats to the life of the poor and the excluded. Sometimes in terms of a sectarian proselytism in which the conversion to Protestant churches of people already baptized in other Christian churches in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is seen as a criterion of authentic conversion to and election in Jesus Christ.

Many of these misunderstandings and misappropriations of Christian mission persist in various forms in our own days. Our common call to witness in preaching and service to God’s coming age – an age of life for all God’s peoples and God’s earth community – summons us to repentance and conversion.

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The mission of Jesus

Our participation in God's mission as individuals and churches must ultimately be modelled on the mission of Jesus (Jn 3.16 and Jn 20.21). The gospels tell us that when Jesus saw the crowds, "he had compassion for them" and "went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness" (Mt 9.35-36).

Though he was in the form of God, the Lord Jesus emptied himself (Philippians 2). Though he was rich, he became poor, so that we may become rich in his grace. A *kenosis* of mission is required in our identifying with the Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, with the poor and excluded (Matthew 25). Mission should begin with powerlessness, not power. The power of the gospel will be made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 12.9f).

How did Jesus understand his mission? "The Spirit of the Lord is on me," he said, quoting the prophet, "because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk 4.18f).

We learn from this passage that mission is the fruit of the Spirit. We see that mission is multidimensional: it includes evangelism and proclamation, the pursuit of (economic, social and gender) justice, the ministry of healing, and the need to break the chains of injustice and the yoke of dependency. Mission is service (Jn 13.12-16). It is acting in compassion (Mt 14.13-21), reconciliation (Mt 5.43-45) and unity (Jn 17.20-23).

The household of life – towards new "postcolonial" missiologies

The theme of our 24th general council is taken from a biblical mission statement: "I came that they may have life, and have it in fullness" (Jn 10.10).

We associate mission in Jesus' way with a range of images related to the household of life: communion or *koinonia*, partnership, hospitality, stewardship, inclusiveness, and gratuity.

The household of our common life is a gift from God, but it is now in disorder and in need of rebuilding and repair. A household (*oikos*) missiology embraces three fundamental aspects of our lives whose names have their root in the same word *oikos* or household: economy, ecology, ecumenism. It therefore includes the evangelical struggles against economic injustice, ecological destruction, and the walls of hostility – new and old – that obstruct Christian communion, human fellowship, and interfaith solidarity.

Our common household is embedded in particular cultures, and can never be captured in a generalized understanding imposed from above. It expresses itself in stories and folk tales, art and song, food and friendship. The idea of household is always plural. Households need to exist alongside other

households. Mission, thus, implies neighbourliness. In our image of household, we do not discriminate between the private and the public spheres, between what goes on inside and outside the house, between the centre and the margins of the world.

The household image emerged from women in mission and draws on women's insights. We lift up this image because we believe it has important implications for our understanding of mission and needs to be developed further.

Likewise, we observe a new emphasis on the Holy Spirit in mission, visible in the challenge of Pentecostalism and in our encounters with other spiritual traditions.

Some draw on the understanding of mission as midwifery, following Gal 4.19; others on neglected New Testament commissions that emphasize the power of weakness, for example, Lk 1.38, Jn 12.14-17; still others on sections of the Hebrew Bible, such as Mic 4.5 or Amos 9.7, that offer new perspectives on the relationship of the people of God to other spiritual traditions. We therefore foresee the emergence of new "postcolonial" missiologies that reject the dominating and power-centred missiologies of the past, and affirm the need for self-emptying in mission.

Challenges to the churches in mission

A wide door for effective work has opened to us, and there are many challenges (cf 1 Cor 16.9).

Our study so far leads us to highlight seven of these.

1. *How inclusively should our churches understand the word "mission"?*
If mission is witness (or just evangelism), does this mean that our engagement in service or in the struggle for justice is not mission? If everything is mission, does this mean that nothing is?
2. *How are our churches to understand and practise mission in the context of economic injustice and environmental destruction?*
The *missio dei* is the mission of a God who redeems the oppressed from their burdens (Ex 6.6) and brings them out of the house of slavery (Ex 20.2) into the household of life, and sets a rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant between God and the earth (Gen 9.13). How then are we to understand the mission of our churches?
3. *How are our churches to understand and practise mission in the context of a new imperialism and aggressive war?*
The *missio dei* is the mission of a God who puts down the mighty from their seat, and scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts (Lk 1.51f). How then are we to understand the mission of our churches?
4. *How are our churches to understand and practise mission in a world of cultural diversity?*

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One church, one faith, one Lord: but how are our churches to interpret the one gospel faithfully in the many cultures and contexts of our world?

5. *How are our churches to include women's perspectives and visions in creating new paradigms of mission?*

Women's stories of mission describe partnership and solidarity as essential to working in the midst of brokenness and pain for healing, transformation and the renewal of creation. Mission as midwifery describes the ways in which women enable communities to bring forth new life.

6. *How are we to overcome the many conflicts and divisions within the Reformed family that separate us from one another, sap our energies and blight our witness to God's reconciling love?*

This requires joint reflection on our understanding of the nature of the church, the authority of Scripture and the work of the Spirit, in the light of the Reformed heritage and the insights of other confessional traditions; theological education and formation that nurture a vision of "my church as one part of the body of Christ" and "my truth as partial and in need of the truths of other parts of the body"; and most critically, the transformation of inherited north-south mission relations so that they foster rather than hinder creative, united and authentic witness.

7. *How are our churches to understand and practise mission in a world of many faiths?*

How do we hold together dialogue and evangelism in interfaith contexts? How do we understand the place of other religions within the *missio dei*? How do we distinguish true witness from proselytism? How do we work with people of other faiths in the common quest for peace, justice and the defence of the earth?

Together in mission: an invitation

We believe that the churches of our Alliance, within each region and across regions, have much to teach and to learn from one another in mission. In the study so far, we have taken a first inventory of what our churches are saying and doing in mission, but we are sharply aware that this is just a beginning. We invite our churches and their delegates in Accra to extend and deepen the mission study in the period following the general council, and to make it their own.

When our 19th-century forebears encountered one another in the mission fields of the south – at that time, mission was still from north to south – they set up the World Presbyterian Alliance (1875) and the International Congregational Council (1891) to do mission better by doing it together. Later, WARC member churches began to view mission ecumenically, with a certain loss of confessional awareness as an unintended consequence. Now we invite our churches and their Accra delegates to ask:

What would it mean to understand our fellowship today as a community of Reformed and United churches working together in mission, related to other churches and mission organizations in the ecumenical world?

Mission as our gift and our task

As we close this letter, we turn to our God in prayer. Mission is given to us as a gift, and we accept it as a task.

Loving God, you have been with all peoples since our creation, and in many ways, you have made yourself known to us as Father and Mother; in you we live and move and have our being.

You have sent your Son Jesus Christ to invite us on a journey of mission, to reconcile the world to yourself, to announce your reign and to redeem creation.

You have sent your Holy Spirit to inspire us, to revive us, to renew us and to extend your witness in us through so many peoples, cultures and religions.

We praise you and we bless you,

For generations of our forebears, women and men, who had been faithful witnesses to the message of the gospel, both in word and deed.

And for those whom you call and send out today, in the power of the Spirit, in solidarity with the poor and the despised, to preach the gospel to all nations, to administer the sacraments; to teach in your name, to work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, to enter into friendship and fellowship with all peoples.

We thank you that in all parts of the earth, a community of love has been gathered together by their prayers and labours, and that in every place your servants call upon your name.

The kingdom and the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. *Amen.*

Grace and peace be with you all,

Setri Nyomi, general secretary,

on behalf of all who have taken part in the mission study so far

Note

1. These phrases are from the report of the department of theology to the executive committee in 2000, *Executive Committee Minutes 2000*, pp.73.

Together in mission

Voices from the regions

Africa

The tremendous growth of Christianity in Africa presents Alliance churches on the continent with opportunities and many challenges, the African consultation on mission said.¹

Participants recognized the long history of Christianity in Africa, stretching back to the early church – see, for example, the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 – and gave thanks for the men and women, local and foreign, who have spread the gospel throughout the continent in more recent times. The church today seems to be growing fastest among the poorest peoples of the world.

They confessed that mission has often been reduced to only one of its dimensions, or viewed as a tool for the expansion of the church or even of a particular denomination. It has devastating historical associations with “such evils as slavery, colonialism, imperialism, racism and sexism”.

Alliance general secretary Setri Nyomi spoke on the mission implications of the Debrecent call to “recognize, educate and confess” with regard to economic injustice and environmental destruction, and pointed to the need to overcome fragmented and disunited ways of doing mission.

Isabel Phiri of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians contrasted colonial interpretations of mission, in which spreading the gospel often went hand in hand with European imperial expansion, with the biblical understanding of mission as God establishing a relationship with God’s world. In their mission practice, churches need to learn from Jesus, who saw mission as bringing out wholeness in people.

André Karamaga, an Alliance vice-president, noted that the role of culture, as a vehicle for carrying the gospel to Africans, has often been ignored. At the same time, mission activity has sometimes fostered a tribalism that churches today must strive to overcome. Effective mission requires a constant interplay between gospel and cultures.

Leading African missiologist Tinyiko Maluleke argued that the close relationship between mission history and western colonial expansionism has left some deep scars in the African psyche and in African church life. Africans need to begin their mission engagement by naming who they are and to articulate their mission understanding in highly contextual terms.

Group discussion revealed that evangelism is central in churches’ understanding of mission in Africa. Second in importance is the African cultural context: mission cannot be effective unless local cultures are taken seriously. The socioeconomic challenges faced by Africans ought to inform the practice of

mission. Religious pluralism, with Muslims and followers of traditional African religions living as neighbours alongside Christians, must be taken into account.

Effective mission in Africa today requires a multidimensional but Christocentric understanding, the consultation said – an understanding that includes contextualization, gender justice, proclamation, liberation, and the local church in social action. This will require churches to “deepen our knowledge of scripture”, “adapt and reconstruct church structures” and “rethink some of the ways in which we do, teach and learn theology”.

Effective mission means understanding the gospel in a holistic manner and rejecting a dichotomy between gospel and culture. Rather, African churches must endeavour to understand culture in all its dimensions – economic, social, political and religious. Patriarchy is still a challenge to the mission of the churches, as is their own identity as African churches.

In their structures, liturgies and theologies, churches need to take better account of the impact of modernity and globalization on African communities, and to see human and ecological issues as one, since God’s love for the world is one.

The combination of poverty and disease, exacerbated by the stranglehold of neoliberal globalization, continues to ravage many parts of Africa, most devastatingly in the HIV/Aids pandemic. HIV/Aids must become central to the life of the churches in all its dimensions.

Many African countries are young democracies without established democratic cultures. Corruption is widespread. Several countries are in the midst of destabilizing wars, or have just emerged from conflict. A mission response demands that the churches learn from historic Christian peace movements and recent African church involvement in conflict resolution, and that they root out corruption from their own structures.

To maximize the mission opportunities offered by the explosive growth of Christianity in Africa, participants committed themselves to breaking the yoke of dependency. They expressed a desire for structures to help Christians in the south work better together and to offer support to African immigrant churches in Europe and North America.

Islam as well as Christianity is growing in Africa, especially in such countries as Sudan, Ethiopia and Nigeria. There is the risk and often the reality of religious conflict. Mission requires a more solid understanding of Islam and the ways in which it is lived on the African continent.

Participants said that they were willing to see constructive initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad) as part of God’s mission, which is larger than the church.

Asia

Constructing an Asian missiology for the 21st century

“‘*Dewa*’ is the term for mission in Islam. It is an invitation to a spiritual life; it is not a demand for conversion.” – A Muslim participant

“The word ‘mission’ is problematic. We need to find a new word for mission which has a more invitational connotation than imposing one value over against other values.” – A Hindu

“A convergence of the fundamental values that Asian faiths share must be found.” – A Buddhist²

In Asia, as in other parts of the world, Christian mission has been questioned by many in the past and present. One of the key problems has been its close association with western colonial power, politically, economically and culturally. This question has been tackled with some success but is not yet resolved.

A second question is Christian mission’s exclusive attitude towards the religions and cultures of Asian peoples because of their difference from Christianity on the theological and cultural levels. In recent years, the rise of religious fundamentalism in both Christianity and Asian religions has aggravated this problem.

Missiological thinking and practice in the 21st century must take the interfaith dimension seriously. God has created diversity and a pluralistic world. We recognize that all religions teach similar values: compassion, equality, justice and human dignity; the ideologies we encounter in Asia also stress these values. We say, therefore, that those who do not practise these values do not truly believe their religions or ideologies. We invite all believers to cooperate in practising these values, as this would obviate the need for conversion or *dakwah*.

The mission of life emerges as a common mission for all faiths and demands the united effort of all peoples and religions.³ Saving the creation is the most urgent concern for religious communities in the face of neoliberal economic globalization and the current hegemonic geopolitical strategies. In this perspective, all peoples are the subjects of mission, which embraces all living creatures. Mission shifts from a church-centred to a life- and people-centred paradigm.

Several world religions and major civilizations arose out of the experience of the Asian peoples. Their cultures are diverse and rich, with much wisdom to offer for life in justice, peace and harmony. The mission of life and for life must draw on the rich religious, spiritual and cultural wisdom of the Asian peoples.

Participants affirmed twelve principles in constructing a new missiology:

1. The united efforts of all peoples and religions can better solve the global crisis of life.

2. The construction of a new missiology requires Christian mission to repent humbly for political domination in Asia.
3. Life in fullness should be a focus of mission in the face of neoliberal economic globalization.
4. The new missiology should honour the wisdom of women.
5. People and life are the pivot of mission.
6. Mission is to enable life to flourish.
7. Mission should be an invitation to life, not conversion.
8. Mission means living together and acting together for life.
9. The construction of a new missiology needs a new space for new vision.
10. Mission demands a *kenosis* of power and greed, and an alternative understanding of power.
11. Healing and the restoration of a whole life is the concrete mission task today.
12. The renewal of all religious faiths and faith foundations in Asia is needed.

Caribbean and North America

Western missionaries in the Caribbean preached Christianity as a “civilizing gospel” to indigenous peoples (Amerindians) they described as “little men”, Africans who they said were not worthy of the gospel, and East Indians they described as uncivilized, uncouth and dirty. The missionaries used Christianity to integrate these people in the social order of the plantocracy.

History helps us to understand the past so that we can transform the church to reflect Christ better, redefining mission in ways that challenge structures of domination, colonialism, racism and sexism. “Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery,” Bob Marley sang in Redemption Song. Today’s independent churches internalized the theologies of the colonizers and need to be cleansed of this colonial mentality. Mission calls for integrity in relationships between sister churches in the Caribbean and North America.⁴

There have been significant changes in recent years in how churches approach mission. These changes include:

- Understanding that both word and deed are integral to the witness and mission of the church; and that one without the other is deficient;
- Dialogue with other denominations and religions;
- Mission integrating social needs;
- Recognition and integration of women in mission;
- Greater coordination of social outreach;
- A shift from clergy-centredness to including lay people;
- Caribbean churches becoming independent from their “mother churches” in North America and Europe; and
- Southern churches becoming “sending churches”.

Justice in the Reformed understanding is a pillar of mission. This challenges churches to work together more effectively on public policy, theology and outreach, finding creative ways to sensitize and involve local congregations, and being open to partnerships with people of other faiths and civil society. Although economic globalization is complex and difficult to understand, the realities of interregional economic injustice are significant mission challenges. This raises an important question: which framework makes it easier to convey the urgency of economic justice – confession or mission?

Poverty in both the Caribbean and North America is higher amongst women than men. In Canada, 20% of women live in poverty; the most vulnerable are First Nations women, women of colour, women with disabilities, immigrants and the elderly.

In the Caribbean, poverty is strongly feminized. Households headed by women are among the most disadvantaged economically and have been on the increase since the 1970s. Women are restricted by child-bearing and child-rearing and often lack the time and resources to organize, apart from networks for economic survival. They are still struggling for recognition of women's rights.

Mission strategies to change the situation of women include emphasizing the importance of their experiences, confronting their subordination in the church, challenging biblical support for women's subordination, organizing women for effective participation, and building alliances with civil society.

Churches in North America find the heart of mission in Mic 6.8: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Missionaries in colonial times brought the gospel, mixed with negative elements, to people of colour throughout the world. Today the church is reviewing, reassessing and rebuilding mission. We must be prepared to listen to and learn from each other and to regard the other as a partner. Mission must honour diversity and cultural difference and address such social problems as race, violence, HIV/Aids.

Churches in the Caribbean need

- to study again the meaning of *missio dei* and to reinterpret the gospel within the social, political and cultural context of the Caribbean;
- to examine their political situation, examining the shift from British colonialism to "Americanization" and economic dependency;
- to rid their societies of suspicions related to race, colour, language and religion and the "divide and rule" mentality;
- to revise the language in which they speak of God, eg God as omnipotent male or master (as in slave and master); and
- to develop more Caribbean expressions in worship, eg music, drama, story.

One of the main challenges of churches in the Caribbean is the lack of trained personnel to serve the church. Too often Caribbean pastors trained in the north remain in the north. Churches within the region must cooperate in leadership development.

Evangelism is another major challenge for churches north and south. Churches need to share experiences of church growth, reflect together on why many churches are shrinking, and identify what aspects of the Reformed tradition attract members. Personal witness, offering comfort and visitation in the context of need, is the most powerful form of evangelism. There is often a discrepancy between how a congregation sees itself and how the community views it. The church must be seen as a church without walls that is hospitable to people. Music and culture are key instruments for church renewal, especially with young people. Evangelism is an invitation and an offer, rather than a demand for conversion.

There needs to be a common understanding of mission, built on churches' commitment to justice as opposed to historical divisions and doctrine. Churches in the south should be encouraged to share threats and challenges from their current realities with churches in the north. Together they can then make joint advocacy and take joint action to address injustices in systems, policies, conditionalities and unfair agreements made under the pressure of powerful states and institutions.

There are many experiences of partnership in mission. Some churches have moved towards cooperative giving and multilateral decision-making. Where bilateral partnerships exist between the north and south, integrity should be encouraged through mutual covenants, mutual planning and two-way cultural exchanges. The Caribbean and North America council for mission (CANACOM) is a structural expression of multilateral cooperative giving and decision-making within the two regions. Traditionally reflective in its approach to issues, the Caribbean and North American area council (CANAAC) should become more active in transforming relationships and mission partnerships.

Europe

The now familiar idea that Christian churches – Reformed churches included – are quickly “changing their face” or that their demographic gravity centre is moving southward tells us something not only about their growth in Africa, North-east Asia or in Latin America but also about their present situation in Europe. There too they are changing. Once national churches, some of them are realizing that they are now Christian churches within increasingly pluralistic societies. Once large churches, many of them are getting smaller. Once powerful and influential in public matters, some of them are realizing that their voice is hardly heard. Once the only answer on offer to the question of human salvation,

some of them are now being compelled to compete with other spiritual organizations for the free individual's choice.⁵

These changes – often seen in terms of the disempowerment of Christian churches, (secularization), the consequent growth of religious pluralism and the growing importance of the free individual's religious choices – can also be described in a more inductive way.

From Scandinavia to Southern Europe, pews are often empty, most church members are “holiday Christians” and the minority of regular attenders is ageing. In 1991, almost 40% of Czechs declared themselves “without religion”; 10 years later, it was almost 60%. Membership in the Church of Scotland declined from 953,000 in 1980 to 607,000 in 2000. The number of people who leave German churches is three times as high as that of people who join them. Church attendance dropped by no less than 20% during the last decade in some western European countries. Church affiliation is often very low among people under 30.

No wonder that the “lived missiology” of Reformed churches in Europe is deeply marked by the present and future challenge of secularization. This complex, multifaceted trend has a different profile in different European regions. In central and eastern Europe, secularization was primarily a programme sponsored by the atheist communist state. It included the confiscation of church property and the marginalization of churches in the public arena. As a result, religious life became a matter of private concern, and church life became more introverted and other-worldly. In western and southern Europe, secularization is primarily a cultural process, induced by the Enlightenment, of moving from a religious to a nonreligious way of construing meaning and grounding action. Its consequences for church practice today are often described as “belonging without believing” and “believing without belonging”.

Which are the emerging challenges to the mission of Alliance churches in a context marked by secularization, growing cultural and neo-religious pluralism, individualism, and societies with markets that are becoming market societies?⁶

European churches are challenged to rethink the proclamation of the gospel in word and deed, going beyond the violence of old and new forms of sectarian proselytism and colonial missiology and the idea that mission and evangelism no longer makes any sense in today's world in general and in Europe in particular.

Christian mission and evangelism in the European context today has to do with new forms of Christian presence and witness in the public sphere as well as private life. These include “moments of missionary contact” that respect the freedom of people who seem neither to regret the loss of religion nor to be searching for meaning; new forms of church life such as the “open churches” of some large urban areas that try to transcend the polarity between the traditional congregation and specialized ministries; and the engagement in diaconic work and solidarity with the growing number of poor and excluded.

The challenge of a renewed public ecumenical witness includes particularly the test case represented by immigrant or diaspora churches, primarily charismatic and from sub-Saharan Africa, that are rapidly changing the face of European Christianity, especially in the large cities and often without the “host” churches noticing.

These new churches raise a wide range of questions ultimately related to the way Reformed European churches, which often mirror a monocultural situation that no longer exists, will shape their witness to the gospel in response to challenges such as the worldwide economic injustice that leads to waves of migration, the racism that is endemic in European societies and the violence it inspires, the widespread fear of cultural and religious pluralism, the trend to exclude these exiles from welfare protection, the vitality of their spiritual life and their mission “from below”, and – last but not least – forms of Christian unity that go beyond traditional “white” ecumenism. What kind of fellowship are rich and white European congregations and churches seeking to establish with the poor African, Asian or Latino congregations and churches next door?

Latin America

Between systemic exclusion and Reformed identity

“Mutual learning for the renewal of mission” captures very well the spirit of the Latin American consultation on mission. Participants shared experiences, theological views and concerns about Christian mission at a time of systemic exclusion and the quest for spiritualities of survival. They reflected on the missiological implications of the central biblical notion of covenant. They heard stories of crises in Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela and learned about ways in which Reformed churches sought to respond to those crises.

If we analyse the responses by representatives of Aipral member churches to the questionnaire that was sent to them prior to the consultation, we can identify eight important concerns.⁷

Globalization and neoliberal power

Some churches point to the materialism that is leading to a new concept of relations between people and between nations, and the influence of the theology of prosperity in the churches. To be up-to-date today, it seems, means to develop this materialistic mentality. The theology of prosperity and neoliberal power are two sides of a coin, and this currency is polarizing church life.

The reality of poverty

Latin American churches are worried by the gulf dividing poor from rich, often reflected in deepening poverty in their own memberships. More and more they need to create projects to help poorer believers, but they also need to keep in

view the structural realities that generate poverty and to interchange their experiences on the ways in which churches with modest resources can confront the problem of poverty.

Presbyterian and Reformed identity

Almost all churches point to the need to redefine their traditional self-understanding in the face of new religiosities. Churches existing in history cannot treat so central an aspect of their life as worship as timeless and immutable. They cannot ignore the new liturgies or the renewal in Christian music and hymnody.⁸ Reformed identity can no longer be reduced to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism.

Church and society

This is a constant theme in contemporary church history – not surprisingly, since pastoral ministry in the Reformed family must integrate creatively the church's own concerns and “internal” life and the challenges posed by national sociopolitical life. It is especially pertinent whenever we face new spiritualities living in a world that is more metaphysical than historical.

Proliferation of sects and new religious movements

Churches ask for help in discriminating between the new forms of religion on offer and in understanding them ecumenically rather than confrontationally. In addition, some Protestant theologies copy the practices of “new age” groups: sermons in our own churches, for example, sometimes copy the intellectual “positivism” that these groups promote.

Church growth

This preoccupation is central in almost all AIPRAL churches. The church must seek to win over sectors of the population, without falling into neo-charismatic euphoria or doing violence to Christian ethics. The fever for growth in some groups is not helpful, since it runs the risk of cheapening Christian grace and reducing the gospel to a simplistic philosophy. This is a question that the churches want to confront with honesty.

Contextual theology

Churches also mention the need to earth the Reformed faith in their different Latin American settings. They want a theology that goes hand in hand with a sincere spirituality – that is not so much “in the head” that it extinguishes the yearnings of the heart. They are under great pressure to turn their back on the concrete social realities that affect their members and the churches themselves. Obviously, they must learn from the one-sided emphases of the past: what the parishes want first of all is pastoral care and attention, not macrostructural

analyses! But the Reformed tradition will make a distinctive contribution to Latin American church life when it takes economics and society seriously and integrates these realities successfully in its preaching and education.

Formation of leaders

In keeping with Reformed tradition, the churches stress the importance of an educational strategy to form a generation of men and women committed to communicating the gospel. Good Christian witness depends on the effective formation of lay and pastoral leaders.

Lively discussion was sparked in the consultation by a paper read by Prof Arturo Piedra, from San José, Costa Rica. Piedra, a professor of theology and church history, used some categories of contemporary mass culture – relativism, hedonism and individualism – to describe what he calls a neo-charismatic, neo-Pentecostal type of Protestantism, a “Protestantism of apostles and prophets”. What is at stake in the remarkable growth of this “postmodern face of Protestantism” in Latin America, he contended, is the way Reformed churches in Latin America relate to their “Protestant, Reformed and Presbyterian heritage”. Are they seeking to be reforming churches in Latin America today?

What will be the future of Reformed churches in a context in which the religious “market” is shaped, on the one hand, by an economic system that generates human exclusion and environmental degradation, and, on the other hand, by the competition between the major religious player, the Roman Catholic Church, and strong emerging players, namely big neo-Pentecostal churches and evangelical churches that appropriate classical and contemporary Pentecostal practices and strategies of growth?

Groups focused on issues of Reformed identity in Latin America. Participants criticized decontextualized, unemotional forms of worship and the marginalization of women in church life, and made proposals for worship renewal, greater inclusiveness in the churches, and social welfare. One group dealt with conflicts inherited from the missionary age, changes in the theological profile of partner churches and the need for Aipral to pursue these discussions. The consultation asked Aipral to include the renewal of mission in its future programmatic work.

Middle East

“It seems that mission is we are sitting in a boat and there are a lot of fish in the sea and we fish them and put them in the boat. But that is not how some of us understand mission.”

“Mission is someone who comes from outside, from somewhere else.”⁹

Mission among Middle Eastern Evangelicals¹⁰ is a controversial word, marked by its history. The western missionaries who brought Protestant Christianity to the region in the 19th and 20th centuries came from outside, both geographically and culturally. They engaged in educational and medical work that endures to this day, but they also made converts, often among the “nominal” adherents of the various brands of Orthodox Christianity. “Mission is always linked in our mind with proselytism, taking people from other churches and bringing them to our churches,” said one participant in the Middle East mission consultation.¹¹ Proselytism by Evangelical Christians is resented by both the Orthodox and the Muslims; in some countries, proselytism of Muslims is against the law and carries legal penalties; in others, it is not illegal but can have serious practical consequences for the proselytized or the proselytizer or both.

Many churches prefer to speak of ministry or service or outreach rather than mission. In the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), general secretary Riad Jarjour replaced the negative word “evangelism” by “the church as a proclaiming entity”.¹²

There are differences in understanding what is meant by mission. At the beginning of the 20th century the Near East School of Theology played an important role in refocusing the understanding of mission among the established Protestant groups. There was a shift from evangelism to witness. At the same time, new Baptist or Pentecostal missionaries who still understood mission in the traditional way began to plant churches. To this day there is a tension between these more “evangelical” churches and many of the churches in the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches.

There are also differences in emphasis. The churches headquartered in Lebanon speak of witness and testimony: “I am less worried about recruiting people into the church than about whether the church is an effective witness in society.” The Evangelical Church of Iran says, “People need to know Christ personally and start a relationship with him... We know that we should preach the gospel to them, we should have progress if we are to remain an active living church.” Making disciples is the priority and the first step.

In Morocco proselytism of Muslims is forbidden, but the Evangelical Church in Morocco says that “we should not conclude too quickly that ‘evangelization’ is impossible”. It is important that the church should be present as a witness to Christ – by existing and maintaining its worship, through dialogue, and by making use of all possible openings.

This difference in emphasis does not create hard and fast lines. The Iranian church recognizes that “we are also called to be instruments of God’s peace and justice and... the channels of God’s love for all people around us”. The churches that stress witness wonder whether witness is enough.

Mission and dialogue

Middle East Evangelicals are not ashamed of their history: “It was a wonderful thing: people needed to be liberated from their spiritual bankruptcy, and Protestantism did that.” But many recognize that success came with a price: cultural estrangement.¹³ “We are proud that we have been able to reshape society, but we did not allow society to reshape us... [Our] spirituality and liturgy is completely western.”

Hence the role of the Evangelical churches in ecumenism and dialogue.

Dialogue can be mere talk that changes nothing. But it can be more. It can be cross-fertilizing, when we really encounter the others, learn from them and allow their witness to challenge our living at its very roots. And it can perhaps be what one participant called “incarnational dialogue” – when we *become the others*. “The more I reflect on my discipleship, the more I believe I have to become an Orthodox, a Muslim. And this is the mission.”

It is an identity question. How are Alliance churches in the Middle East to be Protestant without being western? How are they to be at home in their own cultures, alongside Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim neighbours, without losing their distinctive contribution to church and society in the Middle East?

Mission and justice

Lebanon suffers from a wave of corruption, accentuating inequality of wealth and work, and from environmental irresponsibility, reflected in air and noise pollution, careless water management, poor town planning, and litter in the countryside. Looking at economic and environmental questions globally, within the framework of covenanting for justice, might help the churches to look at them locally.

The National Evangelical Union of Lebanon works with the new Lebanese underclass: migrant workers. In many houses, maids from Ethiopia, Madagascar or Sri Lanka work for a pittance and are treated like dirt. “It’s a form of racism and a form of slavery... Having a maid is like having a refrigerator.”

Armenian Evangelicals are alive to social and political injustice, but have not focused on economic or environmental issues. Every year on April 24, they remember the Armenian genocide and in that context recall what is done today to the Palestinians and others.

In Iran, as in some other Muslim societies, discrimination against Christians under Sharia law is a pressing issue for the churches.

Mission challenges

The biggest challenge identified by the consultation is survival. Christians in many Middle Eastern countries are tempted to emigrate: political restrictions and socioeconomic realities do not encourage them to stay. Theory and practice are fragmented: there are disconnections between theological education and the work of the pastors, between the theology of the pastors and attitudes in the congregations. The churches need a Protestant vision for the Middle East in the 21st century and they need spiritual revival.

Women in mission

In 1875, when the World Presbyterian Alliance was established, there were already several women's mission societies and boards. Women's work in "foreign and home missions" was largely unrecognized and is poorly documented. As well as sending missionaries, women's societies raised funds for mission work through "cent and mite" societies. The first gathering of women in the Alliance took place at the fourth general council (London 1888), where women met to share their experiences, especially in mission work, through women's mission societies and boards. The fifth general council (Toronto 1892) established an international union for women's foreign missionary societies connected with the Alliance. Thus began a global network that was referred to as "the little sister of the Presbyterian Alliance", with the motto "A Girdle round the Earth". Another half-century was required before the "little sister" was allowed to grow up, and women took their rightful place alongside men in the councils of the Alliance.

Women understand mission as a call to proclaim in word and deed the good news that God cares about the broken and marginalized and to serve those in need. They are involved in many mission projects to alleviate poverty, violence and lack of access to health and education. Their ways of doing mission are informed by the specificity of contexts and cultures and value the interplay between practical work and theoretical discussion. Women understand the importance in seeing themselves through the eyes of others and are able to look beyond the boundaries of religious difference in a common quest for justice and human rights.

God's hospitality is like offering a calabash or glass of cool water on a hot steaming day, or washing the feet of a tired traveller you invite into your home. It brings comfort, warmth, safety, security and shelter. It gives food to the hungry, love to the lonely and broken-hearted, hope to those in despair, and peace to those who live amidst violence. Too often the rich look at the poor on the streets through dark sunglasses or tinted windscreens as they drive uncaringly by. God's hospitality must be reflected in mission: it requires that the churches go to the streets and invite the homeless in. The churches must listen to, learn from and stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized.

Women challenge patriarchal patterns of domination and subjugation in churches, cultures and societies. Leadership that uses power over rather than power with people obstructs an agenda for transformation in which women and men can build partnerships of equality. God's mission shows no partiality and does not use domination to rule over others (Gen 11.1-9; Acts 10.34). Women question male images of God as "plantation massa [master]", as a father (who often is never around or when he is home is drunk and abusive), as a violent warrior, and as the one who is powerful and controlling and to be feared. History has shown us how destructive these images can be and how they were used by colonizers, including missionaries, to enslave people. Churches need to include women's perspectives and visions in creating new paradigms of mission as a gateway to empowerment and reciprocity. They need to look for what is liberating and brings wholeness, affirming diverse cultures and building a culture of respect. Gender injustices must be addressed and barriers broken that prevent women from participating fully in the life of the church.

Women's stories of mission describe partnership and solidarity as essential elements in working in the midst of brokenness and pain for justice, healing, and renewal. Mission is seen as spiritual parenthood: "My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4.19). Mission is seen as "midwifery", describing the ways in which women enable communities of people to bring forth new life.

Mission in unity

"As we met, we realized how close we are in our teaching, in our understanding of the life and mission of the church and in the forms of church government. Though we may differ in certain perspectives, we are one in confessing Jesus Christ as God and Saviour."

This statement in 2001 from seven small Reformed churches in Uganda is echoed in other mission in unity encounters. Division within the Reformed family is often taken for granted. Not until churches come together do they realize how much they have in common and how failure to express these commonalities in visible community makes their witness less credible and effective. This is why the mission in unity project was set up in 1999: to be a catalyst and a helping hand as Reformed churches, colleges and communities search for new expressions of mission in unity.

Mission in unity is more than mere collaboration

Churches everywhere agree that, theologically speaking, mission and unity are two sides of one coin – two aspects of being the one body of Christ. But what does this vision of the church imply for the churches as social realities, each with its own history and context?

That disunity and infighting do not enhance credible witness is obvious. There is truth also in the old adage “doctrine divides, mission unites”. In the 19th century, it was unity for the sake of mission that brought Reformed church leaders together for the first general council of the World Presbyterian Alliance (Edinburgh 1877) and the first International Congregational Council (London 1891). In our own time it is, for example, the experience of joint mission ventures that now leads the three Alliance churches in Guyana to consider forms of church unity.

On the other hand, mission *praxis* can also divide, when there are different perspectives on what God calls the church here and now to be and do, and one group believes that separation is the only course open if one wants to remain faithful to the gospel.

This suggests that each situation of disunity needs to be understood on its own terms, for there are no univocal answers or universal solutions. At the same time, mission in unity studies show, and Reformed churches increasingly acknowledge, that our churches tend too easily to split.

In 2000, the mission in unity consultation organized by the Southern Africa Alliance of Reformed Churches said: “We confess... that we are guilty of the sins of disunity and have failed to overcome the status quo of Reformed divisions. We affirm... that Christ calls us to be one in his name and to form one confessing and witnessing communion. We commit ourselves... to give fuller expression to the oneness given in Christ as – locally, nationally and as the Southern Africa region of the Reformed family of churches – we urgently seek to heal our divisions.”

This means more than churches now doing together what they used to do separately. Mere collaboration leaves our identity untouched. The challenge is to rethink the calling of the church and the churches, recognize unity as God’s gift, search for ways to give this visible expression, and be changed in interaction with the others.

There are boundaries to cross but also boundaries to respect

How far do we need to change in interaction with others? What of our identity do we need to retain and what to let go? Which boundaries need crossing and which respecting?

These questions come up in all mission in unity encounters but especially in discussions between mainline and immigrant churches in the north. Immigrants, frightened of losing themselves in a strange and often hostile culture, retreat into the familiarity and support of their ethnic group. Mainline churches often overlook the immigrants in their midst or fail to open their doors to them or welcome them only conditionally (you have to become like us). Or they see immigrants only as objects of mission (we’ll help you) and not as partners in mission (come, and let us complement each other).

The pluralism and diversity of our globalized world often frightens churches, both mainline and immigrant, pushing them into closed identities. But it is in fact a *kairos*, an opportunity to learn unity in diversity by practising it, as several congregations of the United Protestant Church of Belgium are discovering. “It hasn’t been easy or painless – more like an ‘unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies’ experience,” the church reports. “But, like the grain, our church life is being renewed, we are rethinking our mission, and we are attracting new members, including Belgians who haven’t been to church for years.”

The key question is not whether immigrants join existing churches or form their own minority churches, but how both groups learn to respect the other and to relate to each other in ways that affirm the unity of the one church, so that their own identity is no longer a flight behind protective barriers but a starting point for crossing boundaries that exclude.

Mission in context

How we understand mission has everything to do with how we understand God and ourselves, which in turn has everything to do with our circumstances.

It is often the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and Revelation that sustain Christians in war-torn Angola. A pastor writes: “When the women come to Bible study, it is also and perhaps primarily to meet up with one another, to tell each other who has died and who is ill and needs a visit, and to look into each other’s eyes and be assured that they’ve made it into another day. They may not use the word ‘mission’ very much, but they help each other and people in the community to survive, and it is from each other and from the word of God that they get the strength to keep going, to ‘endure to the end and be saved’ (Mt 24.4-13).”

A European student, 8,000 kilometres to the north, says that “for me mission makes sense because I believe that the world can change, that each of us is called to be Christ’s eyes, hands and feet on the way to the beckoning future already inaugurated in Jesus”.

Do we live with an apocalyptic or an eschatological hope? These examples illustrate how our understanding of mission is always contextual, not just because mission challenges vary in different times and places, but also because mission agents have different beliefs about what they can achieve as God’s partners and how God’s new heaven and earth will come about. Mission in unity programmes seek to take seriously the contextuality of mission, without assuming *a priori* that there are indeed areas of mission where different actors can work together in unity.

Notes

1. The consultation, which was held in Yaoundé, Cameroon from November 16 to 21 2003, was attended by over fifty church leaders, women leaders and youth leaders from Alliance churches in Africa. It was at this consultation that the Alliance of Reformed Churches in Africa (ARCA) was launched.
2. These quotations are from the mission round table that took place from November 25 to 28 2003 in Bali, Indonesia. Asian Christians together with friends from Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu communities wrestled with what Christian mission means in Asia today. This open discussion with participants from other faith communities advanced the ecumenical debate on Christian missiology, which has usually been confined within the Christian circle.
3. Since 1999, Christians and Muslims in Indonesia have struggled with communal conflicts that have claimed tens of thousands of innocent lives.
4. The Caribbean and North American mission consultation took place in Georgetown, Guyana from December 1 to 6 2003 and was preceded by a Caribbean women's mission consultation. The World Alliance is grateful to the Guyana Presbyterian Church, Presbytery of Guyana and Guyana Congregational Union which hosted the meeting and assisted with local arrangements. The Alliance appreciates its collaboration with the Caribbean and North America council for mission (CANACOM) in planning the meeting, contributing valuable insights and sharing financial support. WARC member churches from the Caribbean and North America were invited to send two representatives each to the consultation. The Protestant Church in Curaçao and the Church of Scotland in the Bahamas also joined the consultation. Other participants included representatives of the Caribbean and North American area council of the World Alliance (CANAAC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM).
5. In the absence of a European regional consultation on mission, we have based these notes on Christine Lieneman-Perrin, Hendrik M Vroom and Michael Weinrich, eds, *Contextuality in Reformed Europe: The mission of the church in the transformation of European culture* (Amsterdam/New York : Rodopi, 2004), which includes a section on "Mission, Secularisation, and Proselytism"; *Jesus Christ Heals and Reconciles: Our witness in Europe*, the theme paper of the 12th assembly of the Conference of European Churches (Trondheim 2003); and "Open space: The African Christian diaspora in Europe and the quest for human community", *International Review of Mission* 89/354 (July 2000).
6. After the second world war, western European societies espoused the model of a social market economy. Thanks to neoliberalism, the welfare provisions of this model have come under increasing pressure. In central and eastern Europe, the command economies of the communist period had already moved a long way towards market socialism before being subjected to free-market "shock therapy" after *die Wende*.
7. Aipral, the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America, was originally founded as an independent association. At the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997), it became the Latin American area of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The consultation on mission, which took place in São Paulo, Brazil, from June 23 to 26 2002, was held in conjunction with Aipral's 10th assembly.

This meant that the participants were mainly pastors, elders and church officers, rather than mission officers, missionaries or missiologists.

8. As it unfolded, the Aipral assembly constantly signalled this as one of the important challenges facing the Reformed family.
9. Quotations are from questionnaire responses by churches in the Middle East and North Africa or from discussion in the Middle East mission consultation.
10. The preferred term for Protestant Christians in the Middle East. It doesn't mean "evangelical" in the western sense. The Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) links mainline Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed churches in the region. Alliance churches in the Middle East and North Africa fall into three groups: small foreign or expatriate churches in Algeria and Morocco, a large Coptic church in Egypt (the Synod of the Nile, roughly 300,000 members), and smaller churches based in Lebanon or Iran (the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, the National Evangelical Union of Lebanon, the Evangelical Church of Iran, the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East).
11. This small consultation was held in the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, in October 2003. It brought together representatives from the Evangelical Church of Iran, the National Evangelical Union of Lebanon, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, and the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East. Unfortunately, because of visa difficulties, the Synod of the Nile was unable to send a representative.
12. Riad Jarjour, a minister of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, served as MECC general secretary from 1994 to 2003.
13. The chapter on Protestants in Antonie Wessels, *Arab and Christian? Christians in the Middle East* (Kampen: Pharos, 1995) is tellingly entitled "Aliens at home".

Covenanting for justice
in the economy
and the earth

Covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth

Report of the taskforce to the 24th general council¹

In 1995, a Southern African regional consultation on the theme “Reformed faith and economic justice” met in Kitwe and called upon WARC “to consider our submission that a *status confessionis* be declared in the light of the African theological experience”. In response, the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997) called for a committed process of recognition, education and confession (*processus confessionis*) regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction. So WARC set up a programme on covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth and together with its global ecumenical partners, the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and regional ecumenical organizations, organized a series of regional consultations that would work on the process of recognition and education. This led to the south-south gathering of 27 member churches in Buenos Aires (2003), which took a “Faith stance on the global crisis of life”, and to the south-north gathering of 26 member churches in London Colney (2004), “The time has come”. The point of confession had been reached.

23rd general council

(Debrecen 1997)

Break the chains of injustice

Seoul/Bangkok 1999

Asia (also interfaith)

Message to churches of the north and south

Budapest 2001

Central/eastern Europe

Serve God, not Mammon!

Fiji 2001

The Pacific

The island of hope

Soesterberg 2002

Western Europe

Economy in the service of life

Buenos Aires 2003

Latin America

Enough is enough

Stony Point 2004

North America

Just trade in the service of an economy of life

Cape Town 2001

WARC

The theological basis of covenanting for justice

Buenos Aires 2003

South-south member churches (WARC)

Faith stance

London Colney 2004

South-north member churches (WARC)

Faith stance

24th general council

(Accra 2004)

That All may have Life in Fullness

About 80 member churches have also been part of the covenanting for justice programme and eight of them have made a declaration or statement. In 1998, the Presbyterian Church of Korea said “We must repent... of thinking wrongly that faith and matters of economy are separate. We have not taught the need for a faithful economic ethic... The Korean church must now take an active role in reforming the world economic order into a just structure...” In 2000, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Portugal affirmed life, committing itself “to resist actively, to contribute to the change of the world’s economic order and to participate in the search for a just economy...The excessive neoliberal behaviours are sin.” In 2001, the Waldensian Evangelical Church expressed its “deepest aversion to economic injustice and political violence”; at the same time recognizing that its members “are co-responsible for this situation as citizens of one of the richest countries of the world..” In 2003, the Reformed Churches in Argentina affirmed their “faith in Jesus, who has already overcome the project that infringes the will of God” and committed themselves “to proclaim, to work and to live for the life that God intends for all”.

The global civil resistance that started from Seattle in 1999 also helped the churches to recognize the seriousness of the problem and they have begun to cooperate with global civil movements in order to build an alternative model of economy.

What we have recognized

The economic situation

Over the last seven years many changes have occurred on the global economic scene. The Bangkok consultation of 1999 took place during the so-called Asian crisis, which hit those Asian countries that had liberalized their economies in response to the recommendations of the international agencies. The heart of their letter to the churches of the north says:

We listened to the stories of farmers, women, indigenous peoples, fisher folk, the urban poor and slum dwellers (about) the casualization of cheap labour, feminization of poverty, the increase in child labour and trafficking of children, and ecological destruction in Thailand, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. We are struck by the commonality of the consequences of debt and the globalization of the economy on our societies... based on neoliberalism.

The Budapest conference took place in 2001 after the countries of central and eastern Europe had been hit by the rapidity and harshness of the transformation process from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one:

In 1989 about 14 million people in the former communist bloc lived on less than four dollars a day. By the mid-nineties that number had risen to 147 million people. At the same time... there has developed... excessive

wealth for a small minority... Where communism had relied on unrestricted state planning, politicians and leaders now embraced the unrestrained market mechanism as the path to a better future... This neoliberal “shock therapy”, requiring a shrinking role for the state, simply disabled existing social provisions for ordinary women and men... Economic globalization in its present form threatens values such as justice, charity, peace and sobriety that are rooted in Christian traditions. It replaces them with the values of unrestrained consumerism and the increasing commercialization of society.

The south-south conference took place in 2003 in Buenos Aires. Twenty-five years ago 9% of the population of Argentina were poor and 50% middle class. Now, as a result of faithfully following the prescription of the international monetary organizations, 59% are poor and the middle class has shrunk dramatically. Together with the representatives of the churches of Africa and Asia, they reported the growing harshness of the structural adjustment of their economies and the growing imperial domination of the financial markets. And so they spoke of a

dramatic convergence of the crises for countries of the south... Creation is in crisis... We are conscious of the new signs of the times: the unparalleled integration of economic globalization and global geopolitics... We are clearly living in a new stage of capitalism, which combines all forms of power and affects all dimensions of life... It is also new in its far-reaching and all-encompassing strategy of domination where the global financial market is empire and god... Through neoliberal globalization, the economy, designed to sustain life and the wellbeing of all, has become a totalitarian faith system of wealth accumulation for the few, endangering life as a whole on our planet... We are united in our rejection of this model.

Since Debrecen, WARC and its member churches have been working hard to recognize the economic crisis and the destruction of the environment. It has been easier for the victims to see this than it has for the beneficiaries. Much education has taken place and many people have learned more about the way the financial world is organized and the planet is endangered.

New signs of the times

Since the 1997 Debrecen call, the signs of the times have become more alarming and the situation is much worse. The world has witnessed the increasing and intensifying suffering of people; one example would be the pandemic of HIV/Aids, especially in Africa. The world order has provoked hunger, poverty, economic breakdown and financial crises. Economic crises in Asia and Latin America have brought about unwitnessed suffering and the disintegration of

people's lives. The Caribbean, because of its small populations and the fragile nature of its economies and ecosystems, has experienced job losses, grinding poverty, an unprecedented rise in crime and violence, ecological degradation and the rise of HIV/Aids. In the Pacific island nations, economic and ecological problems are tightly interconnected. Global warming endangers the low-lying islands, nuclear testing contaminates the sea, the land, the people, and all living creatures, and mining increases deforestation and destroys the rain forests.

There is a dramatic convergence between the sufferings and cries of the people and the irreversible destruction and degradation of the ecology of the earth. There have emerged remarkable new signs in the process of the unparalleled integration of economic globalization and global geopolitics.

- The world has become monopolar and dominated by the empire.
- The world is experiencing a global military strategic integration, as demonstrated by the US "war on terror". There is growing militarism, as war has become the primary means of securing the global market.
- The unilateral domination of the empire in global politics is witnessed to by the paralysis of the UN.
- Violent conflict between religious groups is provoked at every level and then used for geostrategic purposes by the empire.

Our faith community is called to act urgently because the whole of creation is groaning and the sufferings of people are intensifying. This leads us to root ourselves firmly in our biblical and Reformed base as we respond to this challenge.

What we have learned: God's economy

Reformed theology of the economy

Reformed theological teaching says that every economic activity builds on the gifts of God. Therefore material goods are the instruments of God's grace in the service of life. Money becomes mammon when it is used to victimize God's people and the earth. Human economic activity needs regulation because human beings are greedy. When defined by God's covenant, the economy is life-enhancing and life-centred for the people of God, all living creatures, and the whole earth (Genesis 9). When illumined by the grace of God, the economy of the covenant is an "economy of community" in which love and justice form the spiritual basis.

- Whereas today's neoliberal economy is exclusive, God's economy is inclusive.
- Whereas the neoliberal economy is an exploitative economy of the poor, God's economy is a protective economy in favour of the poor.
- Whereas in the neoliberal economy the flow of wealth is from the poor to the rich, in God's economy it goes from the rich to the poor.

- Whereas in the neoliberal economy the poor are invisible, in God's economy the vulnerable are before everyone's eyes.
- Whereas the neoliberal economy is based on greed and profit-making, God's economy is based on community and mutual support.
- Whereas the neoliberal economy is based on limitless competition, God's economy is an economy of cooperation.

The preferential option for the poor

The World Commission on Environment and Development's report, *Our Common Future*,² captures the essential feature to which the Bible calls us in one phrase: "Overriding priority is to the essential needs of the world's poor." This provides the criteria for any economic and social action, whether by individuals, communities or institutions, churches, public authorities or enterprises.

Priority

If someone or something has priority, it comes first. If the essential needs of the poor have priority, they must be served before any other needs. This rules out any action or policy that first enriches the rich, even if it claims to improve the lot of the poor later. For instance, this rules out the "trickle-down" policies so dear to neoliberals. *Overriding* priority simply underlines the urgency. The priority must be exercised, there can be no arguments for delay.

The poor

The poor includes the deprived, those who have been denied the means of subsistence, the means to protect themselves. The poor are the orphans, the widows and the strangers, to whom the Bible constantly recalls our responsibilities. They are the weak, the ones without property and resources; the vulnerable, those to whom Jesus addressed his message of liberation (Lk 4.18-19, Mt 25.34-45); those who are denied the fullness of life. The poor may be individuals, but they may equally well be families, communities, countries or cultures. For example, indigenous peoples should be protected from the attempts by transnational corporations to appropriate their knowledge and culture for private profit.

God's call is to give priority to *the world's* poor, who should enjoy their life in equality and dignity. Who is my neighbour? (Lk 10.29-37) Jesus drives us beyond the boundaries of race, gender, caste, class and nationality. My neighbour may be anywhere. So this has implications for the migration and refugee policies of so many rich countries.

Essential needs

The poor are the primary actors in God's economy. It is for them to define their needs. It is not for anyone else to answer in their place. We can, however,

be sure that they include humanity, dignity and the autonomy with which God has endowed every person, every community and every culture (eg Deut 24.10). Whatever is done to enable the poor to meet their needs should bear this dignity in mind. High among these needs is security. Each day they need to find today's food, as the Lord's prayer reminds us ("Give us *this day* our daily bread"). Any economic policy that imposes risks on the poor calls this injunction into question. For example, there is opposition to the policies of the World Trade Organization, which put the food security of poor communities at risk; or one of the arguments against genetically modified seeds is that they may endanger the crops of poor farmers.

That some can be confined to an economy of mere survival or even death is an affront to the overflowing abundance, the fullness of life, that God promises to all.

The wholeness of creation

God is the giver of all life. We recognize God's joy in the totality of creation and God's blessing of all that is created (Psalm 104). God's covenant invites all beings into a relationship in which all creation participates in common living. God's covenant for life extends to all creation and beyond the present to the future (Gen 9.8-11). An economy that does not recognize this principle is an economy of sin against God's creation.

We have broken the covenant. We continue to abuse nature through the indiscriminate exploitation of God-given natural resources such as water, land and air. Millions of people are deprived of the life-giving resources of land and water because they are appropriated for profit. Waters are polluted, thereby killing the very source of life for all. Indigenous peoples' cultures and spirituality that are closely linked to the earth are destroyed, taking away the basis of their identity and survival. Women's life-giving roles are threatened. We need to recognize that God's economy means interdependence for the mutual benefit of all creation. This is well expressed in *ubuntu* (I am because we are – we are because I am), an African concept of interrelatedness between all creation including God and *sang saeng* (living together), a Korean concept of conviviality and interdependence.

An economy of life would release the earth to replenish all life. We are called to protect and not to destroy the life-giving power of the earth. God's covenant must be reaffirmed in order for us to be faithful and obedient as people of God.

An orchard of blossoming economies:

An alternative vision of God's economy

It is often suggested that there is no alternative to the neoliberal economy. This is not true, as can be shown by thinking of the economy as either a tunnel or a fruit tree. The tunnel represents the present process of globalization. All

people and all economies are expected to go through the tunnel of growing productivity and competitiveness in the global market if they wish to reach the light at the end – a high standard of consumption for everyone. However not all traffic is welcome in the tunnel. The least efficient, least productive elements such as the unemployed and those countries not willing to adapt or modernize get in the way. The fastest vehicles have their own privileged lane. Finally, everyone must accept the stress, pollution and noise in the tunnel. The traffic has priority over the environment.

A tree is quite different from a tunnel. A healthy tree is full of life and its growth is quite different from the journey through the tunnel. Firstly, all the living cells of the tree participate. Secondly, the tree does not overburden its own environment: it enriches it. Lastly, it bears fruit, both to sustain its own life and to feed others. The activity of the cells is meaningful labour, the surroundings are the global environment and the fruits, the fulfilment of all basic needs. So how can a simple tree do what the most advanced type of tunnel economies cannot?

As soon as maturity is reached the tree refrains from further vertical growth and puts its energy and resources into making fruit. Its basic rule is blossoming not expansion. Even in the richest countries the law of endless market expansion is becoming a curse: stress is growing, environmental problems are uncontrollable, and everything is under the rule of the market, which continues to demand higher productivity and competitiveness.

But this could all change if the demand for an ever rising standard of living were abolished and new patterns of production, consumption and distribution were based on caring and sharing. The material wealth of the wealthy has grown enough. Their trees are now mature and should leave space for new trees to develop and blossom. Our alternative is an orchard of blossoming economies, each bearing its own kind of fruit. The time has come for radical change if total catastrophe is to be prevented and all creation to enjoy fullness of life.

Implementing alternatives in God's economy

In the present situation, when the dominant ideology claims there is no alternative, it is crucial to show that transition to another kind of economy is possible. God's economy, as witnessed to in the Bible, is not wishful thinking. The people of God in different contexts of oppressive and enslaving systems, since the empires of the ancient Near East, have implemented alternatives and have sought to tame those elements of the economy not in line with God's caring love for all creatures.

Fullness of life for all and the common good are the basic criteria of God's economy. Therefore, the local/regional community of families and persons living together in a given natural, cultural and social habitat are the basic unit

and reference point (Numbers) rather than the individual. There are forms of property that are socially just and ecologically careful. These would give all people access to the gifts of God, since God is the final owner of the earth.

Property, access and control may take various forms in the different cultural contexts of communities and peoples. We have to overcome the false notion that there can only be either a purely privatized or a centralized economy. The key perspective is developing an economic order from below so that the lives of people are secured. All legal, institutional and political structures from the local via the national up to the global level have to serve society so that all may live in harmony with each other and nature. The alternatives may include community, cooperative or public ownership as well as ownership for private use, all under ecological and social conditions decided by the community. Besides land there are other basic goods and services, which must be secured in similar ways, such as water, energy, health, education and transport. All people must have access to the abundance of creation, not only those who have purchasing power on the basis of property or contracted labour.

This provision of public goods and services needs to be regulated at different levels including the global with the participation of those affected. So churches should engage with civil movements trying to prevent the present attempts of the governments of rich countries to privatize all public services, in the context of the World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) negotiations. They should also struggle to stop the privatization of intellectual property, for example, the patenting of seeds and pharmaceuticals (eg against HIV/Aids) and popular culture, in the context of the WTO's Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS).

Another key area is production and labour. Small- and medium-sized companies related to local/regional communities would have priority in an economy oriented to the needs of local people. Large and transnational industrial production units and corporations would require public control to ensure good working conditions, just wages, ecological standards and just taxation. Social and cultural rights should be applied universally, and this should include farmers, workers and migrant labour. This is possible if governments and all the actors in civil society cooperate rather than compete.

The present financial markets and the international monetary system are characterized by speculation, tax evasion and undemocratic institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These institutions impose structural adjustment programmes on over-indebted countries, with one notable exception, the United States of America. It is not true that there is no alternative in this crucial field. Alternative proposals include a global central bank, international liquidity facilities, a structural fund (like the European Union Structural Funds) to share among richer and weaker regions, and a trade regime that would discipline the richer nations. The UN could be the democratic

framework, rather than the undemocratic International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which operate on the basis of “one dollar one vote”.³ The vision of an “orchard of blossoming economies” would be furthered by these proposals. The economic growth of poor countries needs to be enhanced, whereas the economic expansion of the richest countries cannot go on unhindered.

It is possible for the peoples of the world to change the present situation if they unite their forces. They can work for alternatives at the local/regional levels where they have direct access. At national, regional and global levels they can build alliances and movements to struggle for the political space to win control over the economy. Churches from the perspective of God’s inclusive and life-enhancing economy are called to join the struggles of the poor and be in solidarity with them in order that all may both live and live in harmony with creation.

Covenanting for justice in the economy and earth

We have recognized the signs of the times from Debreccen until now. Economic injustice and ecological destruction prevent the fullness of the life that God gives to all creation.

The covenant God made with all creation is at stake and therefore life is under serious threat. The neoliberal language of contracts, competition, privatization and the absolute freedom of the individual is not compatible with the concept of covenant.

God’s covenant affirms God’s promise over and against the powers of destruction and dominance of the empires (from Egypt to Babylon to Rome and on).

God initiates a covenant with people when their lives are in crisis. They become God’s partners. God’s covenant with Noah, his descendants and every living creature was made when the whole world was completely devastated by flood (Genesis 9). God’s covenant with Abraham was made when Abraham had neither descendants nor land. Jesus’ covenant was made when we had no salvation. Therefore the biblical covenant is a God-initiated process of normalizing an abnormal situation. God’s covenant is an act of liberation from untruth that leads into truth.

While the rules of the empire are exclusive and life in fullness reserved for the “few” and the “greatest”, God’s covenant is inclusive of the whole earth, God’s people and all living creatures (Genesis 9). What is more, in order to correct the exclusiveness that deprives people and living beings of life, God’s covenant begins by drawing into active partnership the most excluded, the poor, the vulnerable, slaves and strangers. In God’s covenant, the last are first and the first last. When all beings live together in covenant, we will find that God has given plenty and there is enough for all.

Covenanting is an action not only of putting oneself into the other person's place, but also of recognizing oneself in the other. In the covenant, God put God's own self into all creation. In the covenant that God has made with the whole of creation, all members of creation are put into one another's place. Covenant is a decisive form of solidarity, overcoming the contradictions caused by unjust powers (Gal 3.26-29).

In the context of life threatened, communities dismantled and the truth distorted, we must reaffirm and renew the covenant that God made with all creation, that Christ made new and promised would never be broken, and that the Holy Spirit continues to renew even today.

The time has come to reject the false discourse that challenges the sovereignty of God and impoverishes the life of creation. The time has come for churches that are unfaithful to God's covenant to repent of their unfaithfulness. The time has come for abnormal life to be normalized. The time has come to strengthen covenantal solidarity among all life.

Covenantal action

Repentance

God calls us, as individuals and the church, to confess and repent of the ways in which we have been and continue to be unfaithful and disobedient to God's covenant. For God's vision is for the earth to live in conviviality and security. In our context, where so many people, places, and species of the earth are systemically excluded from the fullness of life, faithfulness to God's covenant means working to overcome our embeddedness in the current system.

The time has come for the general council to call churches and members to repent of complicity, through silence, denial, or direct activity, with these particular features of neoliberal capitalism:

1. where debt enslaves people and nations and denies basic needs
2. where systemic ecological damage destroys the habitat of life
3. where we have succumbed to greed for material wealth and possessions
4. where property is coopted by large capital owners as absolute property for private accumulation at the expense of the common good
5. where the financial system leads to speculation, corruption, tax evasion and extortionate rates of return on capital.

In faithful response to God's covenant, the time has come for the general council to call churches and members to repent by

1. overcoming greed and consumerism
2. refusing individualistic understandings and expressions of faith
3. overcoming unjust salary scales
4. disinvesting from banks and funds involved in speculation, tax evasion and taking interest rates beyond growth rates
5. paying more attention to the preservation of natural habitats.

Rejection

The time has come for the general council to call churches and members to take a faith stance against the structural and practical implications of neoliberal capitalism. This ideology systematically excludes the poor, creates suffering, destroys the earth, and claims sovereignty over all of life. It claims to be without alternative and thus challenges the sovereignty of God. Neoliberal ideology challenges and is in opposition to God's covenant. It is based on

1. the principle of private property without any social or ecological obligation and contract as the only legal basis
2. greed, competition, consumerism and the limitless accumulation of wealth as best for the whole world
3. privatizing the gifts of God, as well as liberalizing, deregulating and protecting the markets in the interests of the capital owners
4. misusing technological power so that it plunders, degrades, and destroys the earth's resources and manipulates and destroys the biological texture of life at all levels.

In faithful response to God's covenant the time has come for the general council to call churches and members to reject

1. legal regimes that protect neoliberal powers and principalities and both sacrifice people and life
2. the military regime of the empire that victimizes people and life through wars and weapons and destroys peace on earth
3. the environmental regime that exploits natural resources and living beings and does not care for life on earth
4. the way in which communication and information are used to dominate the consciousness of the people
5. greed that destroys the human person and community.

Action

Faithfulness and obedience to God's covenant requires that we work to enact God's inclusive vision for living together in plenty for all. The time has come for the general council to call member churches, congregations and members to act in accordance with God's covenant for justice in the economy and the earth by examining the following areas of the life of the church: spiritual life, pastoral care, education, finance, diaconal work regarding ecological and economic initiatives, mission, and ecumenical relations.

Examples of things that churches have done

- Resisting consumerism and living simply in order that the lifestyles of some do not destroy people and the earth
- Challenging rich church members to follow Jesus and share
- Building spiritual life, through worship, Bible study and prayer, based on economic justice and ecological integrity
- Educating children in church school/Sunday school about economic justice and ecological integrity
- Tithing in order to support the poor and the community
- Engaging in mission/diaconal work related to ecological issues and degradation of the environment
- Adopting congregational mission statements that include economic justice and ecological integrity and implementing them
- Sharing work and income to prevent redundancy and ensure that everyone has a living wage
- Investing in sustainable funds, alternative banks, and cooperative initiatives
- Working to enact a sustainable economy by supporting initiatives such as “fair/just trade”
- Practising jubilee measures of debt relief and sabbath at both personal and communal levels

Churches, congregations, and members are called to act in solidarity at all levels by

- joining the resistance of the victimized
- gathering and sharing the wisdom of the victimized to build an alternative vision to the current neoliberal one
- building the economy of life through sustainable initiatives in alliance with the global ecumenical movement, faith communities, civil movements, and committed Christian groups in order to overcome the idolatry and injustice of neoliberal capitalism
- working to live together in harmony with all living beings on earth.

Recommendations

The taskforce recommends the general council

- to take a faith stance against neoliberal capitalism and its structural and practical implications because it is not compatible with the gospel;
- to call upon all member churches at all levels to be engaged in the process of covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth, with the aim of actualizing God's economy for fullness of life for all;
- and its member churches to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community and community of other faiths, civil movements and people's movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation;
- to reflect on this vision of the life and work of the Alliance through the decisions and recommendations of the policy and public issues committees;
- to urge its member churches at all levels to implement the vision through a covenantal act.

Notes

1. The members of the taskforce on covenanting for justice appointed by the WARC executive committee are Elizabeth Nash, Omega Bula, Edward Dommen, Ulrich Duchrow, Bob Goudzwaard, Kim Yong-bock, Gretel van Wieren, Takatso A Mofokeng, Leonor Briones and Park Seong-won (WARC staff).
2. World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford University Press, 1987), p.43.
3. Already in 1944, at the Bretton Woods Conference, the great economist of the last century, JM Keynes, proposed an institutional framework that would have made possible a socially regulated global economy after World War II. A similar design was suggested by the UNDP Human Development Reports of 1992 and 1994 to the World Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995. In 1944 the plans were rejected by the USA, in 1995 by the neoliberal G7.

Faith stance on the global crisis of life

South-south member churches forum
Buenos Aires, Argentina, April 23-26 2003

Creation today faces a global crisis of life. In this kairos, a moment demanding a clear and unambiguous decision, a south-south forum of member churches was convened by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Buenos Aires from April 22 to 26 2003. WARC member churches of the south, which experience serious consequences of economic globalization, gathered to reflect and take a faith stance in response to the 23rd general council's call for a committed process of recognition, education and confession (*processus confessionis*) regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction.¹

Our gathering in Buenos Aires acknowledged the present moment in the world's history as a kairos challenging us to decisive action. We have seen and heard the appalling situation experienced by our sisters and brothers in Argentina. The current crisis in Argentina presents new problems for consideration in the ongoing process of confessing our faith that the 23rd general council initiated in Debrecen in 1997. We met with the particular consciousness of the journey from Kitwe to Buenos Aires, being aware of the call of the African churches (Kitwe 1995) for the declaration of a status confessionis on economic injustice. On this journey, in many ways, churches around the world have been responding to economic injustice and ecological destruction. Some churches like the Presbyterian Church in Korea and the Presbyterian Church in Venezuela made faith stances on the crisis of life in their context.²

As churches of the south, we were compelled by the critical situation and immense suffering of our communities to consider seriously our experiences and their significance for the process of understanding and analysing our newly emerging economic and ecological situations. The sharing of our experiences of suffering and reflecting on our faith led us to take a faith stance as we look toward the 24th general council in Accra in 2004 and beyond.

The crisis of life

Experience of the crisis of life

We hear the crying of the people and the groaning of creation...

In Buenos Aires, we have seen the immense suffering which has been caused by the economic crisis. We were shocked to hear that 25 years ago, Argentina had a population of 22 million with less than 2 million poor people; today, the population is 37 million, with 21 million poor people. People in Argentina, like many others in the world, have been deceived by illusion. Over the last 25 years, the increase in the number of poor people has been greater than the

increase in population; the middle class, which used to be 50% of the population, has dramatically decreased; and only 30% of the population has regular employment.

We are clearly living in a new stage of capitalism, which combines all forms of power and affects all dimensions of life. The capitalist system has switched its focus from production to finance. It is also new in its far-reaching and all-encompassing strategy of domination where the global financial market is empire and god. The empire is a global financial one bolstered by military, political and ideological power, and its forces determine the survival of the countries and people at the periphery. The market empire and military forces oppress at all levels, social, political, economic, ecological and spiritual, creating crises for all peoples and all countries in the world.

The consultation heard experiences from representatives of member churches in the south, who voiced the reality of the current crisis. Argentina and South Korea were held up as models of the depth and extent to which the neoliberal strategy subjects the whole world to the laws of privatization and unhindered expansion of capitalist markets.

The churches represented from Latin America related the way in which economic globalization has triggered the crises of debt, trade, marginalization, insecurity, economic inequality, unemployment and the destruction of the environment. The lie that free market policies are a panacea for social and economic problems has been unmasked, and the promise of wealth and prosperity (investment, growth, and employment) has not been fulfilled. Instead, neoliberal economic policies have resulted in social and economic crises, especially for the middle class and poor.

The threats to the Caribbean created by economic globalization mirror those of the rest of the world. Yet, the problems are more dramatic because of the small size of the populations and the fragile nature of the economies and ecosystems. Economic globalization has created job loss and grinding poverty, an unprecedented rise in crime and violence, ecological degradation, and the spread of HIV/Aids. All of these have degraded life.

Asian countries have also been experiencing the negative effect of the neoliberal strategy, beginning with the unexpected and serious economic crisis in 1997. In South Korea, for example, as the western banks suddenly stopped rolling over their loans to Korean corporations, the exchange rate of the Korean Won against the US dollar changed from 800 Won to 2,400 Won to one dollar. In other words, shortage of foreign currency sent the Korean Won into free fall, with its value cut to one-third at its lowest point. Thousands of firms and enterprises fell into bankruptcy and hundreds of financial institutions, merchant banks, and credit unions were closed down. Millions of workers were fired. The social consequences were a tremendous increase in the homeless, broken families, suicides and violence. Five years later, despite claims by the

IMF and the Korean government that the economy has recovered well, the structural crisis has deepened, and the suffering of the poor and unemployed or underemployed has increased. Over 600 of the best industries and banks were sold to multinationals, which have now taken over more than 30% of the stock market. It is said that the Korean economy may face another crisis, because of the terribly increased loans and debts, both foreign and internal. The structural adjustment programme forced by the IMF has only increased structural injustice, widening the gap between the rich and the poor. In Indonesia, the IMF intervention has totally failed. The mask of the neoliberal system has been lifted.

The African experience of the crisis gave rise to the cry at Kitwe, which voiced the systemic exclusion of Africa from the global economy, the growing gap between rich and poor, social disintegration, hunger and disease. The effects of the free market system on the HIV/Aids pandemic are evident in the management and treatment of the disease. The policies and practices of transnational pharmaceutical companies have privileged profits over the health of people, and the high cost of HIV/Aids drugs and trade agreements exclude the poor from effective treatment and prevention from infection.

The economic and ecological problems of the Pacific island nations are tightly interconnected. The ecological problems are real and dangerous. Global warming endangers the low-lying islands; nuclear testing contaminates the sea, land, people and all living creatures. Especially affected are the Marshall Islanders and Tahitians. Mining and logging increase deforestation, resulting in the destruction of most of the rain forest of the island countries. Economically, the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. Socially, there is an increase in crime, violence and suicides.

The most significant feature of these reports is the dramatic convergence of the crises for countries of the south. We are conscious of the new signs of the times: the unparalleled integration of economic globalization and global geopolitics. We were unanimous in our recognition of the negative effects of the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization in their domination and exclusion of the southern nations. We share the experience of the negative and destructive effects of deregulation and speculative investments on our national economies. We recognize the current trend of militarism as a total-war strategy of security for the global market. We recognize the ways in which our hearts and minds are invaded and dominated by print and electronic media in a "colonization of consciousness". We are convinced that the neoliberal model cannot be transformed or adjusted: it has inherent contradictions and has failed again and again to lift the countries, peoples and natural environment of the south toward life. We are united in our rejection of this model. We are not alone, as significant movements in civil society, including the global peace movement, are also resisting and rejecting the model as destructive of all creation.

Critical analysis of the crisis of life

The experiences of the peoples of the south reported at our meeting reveal a great diversity of problems, pains and threats. Each country carries the weight of her own history behind her present predicament. Yet striking elements of commonality also emerged. These common themes pointed to at least two of the root causes of the economic and ecological problems.

Change driven by the powers that be

We are aware not only of rapidly changing social, cultural and economic reality, but also that the most painful and difficult changes and pressures are being forced upon us from the outside. For example, previous colonial powers still have a hand in a lot of so-called ethnic conflicts; transnational corporations, not national industries, take the lead in the so-called modernization of the economy. The actions of these firms are often accompanied by increasing poverty (especially in the traditional sectors of the economy); a systematic deterioration of nature and a loss of indigenous cultures; the world of finance and international financial institutions demands continual reductions in wages, subsidies and government budgets, and in doing so, they claim authority over national governance and economic policies.

Change driven toward the ends of the global market

We are also deeply concerned with the direction of the changes made by the powers that be. The question we must always ask is: will these changes lead toward fullness of life for God's creation? Overwhelmingly, the primary concern of global market players is financial profit, even at the expense of life. When poverty deepens, then comes suffering and death. And if violence grows between groups, and is even accelerated by political and economic powers from outside, then again we see the dynamics of death at work.

All of these problems are interconnected. They aggravate each other in disastrous ways, constantly pushing us away from the God of life and from fullness of life for all. Therefore, we must ask what lies behind this ongoing cult of death and its life-denying forces. Is it because modernization, technology, and all forms of the market are in themselves bad?

We have to dig deeper. The dynamics of death and exclusion are of human making. They have a common base. The neoliberal deregulation of the capitalist market at all levels, driven by an unbridled lust for money and control, turns the market into an idol.

Economically, the capitalist market no longer serves the exchange of useful goods and services for all, nor is it willing to be held politically and socially accountable for the common good. Built on the exclusive private property of a minority of owners, the pure deregulated market has one single goal: to maximize the accumulation of wealth by a few, which the Bible calls Mammon.

Capital goes less and less into long-range sustainable production of goods and services. Instead, capital is concentrated in financial dealings, causing unemployment, degradation of working conditions, and increasing structural indebtedness. Nature is seen only as raw material for wealth accumulation. And technology serves the same purpose, even risking irreversible damage in the case of biotechnology.

Politically, nation states and democratically elected governments are weakened, blackmailed or coopted. They are less and less able to put social and ecological obligations (taxes) on private property. Basic public services like water, energy, transport, health, and education are being privatized so that only people with buying power have access to them. The democratic UN system has been out-manoeuvred step by step. The rich nations have taken over by dictating international policy through undemocratic institutions like the G8, the IMF and the World Bank (only those who pay have a say) or by the WTO with the transnational corporations as the main advisors.

Ecologically, creation is in crisis. Mother earth is dominated, exploited, raped and murdered for profit by greedy companies and selfish human beings.

Ideologically, the colonization of consciousness, reinforced by most of the media, makes people believe that there is no alternative (TINA). Not to follow the market laws is regarded as sin.

Militarily, the USA and the western powers (NATO) have developed a global hegemonic strategy to protect their economic interests worldwide. They have openly broken international law, and have spread violent conflict and reactive terrorism all over the earth. We are seriously worried that rich countries are more and more inclined to use military force to impose the neoliberal economic system in the world, playing a divine Caesar. The war against Iraq is a clear example of this kind of politics, and war again is a continuation of politics to extend domination. This war reveals a crisis of the international institutional system which endangers the balance among all nations.

In short, through neoliberal globalization, the economy, designed to sustain life and the wellbeing of all, has become a totalitarian faith system of wealth accumulation for the few, endangering life as a whole on our planet. This system is structural sin. Globalized neoliberalism is in complete contradiction to the central tenets of the Christian faith.

With regard to economics, these contradictions are the following (as understood by Calvin and the whole Reformed tradition): While God's economy is inclusive, neoliberal economy is exclusive. While God's economy is a protective economy for the poor, neoliberal economy is an exploitative economy of the poor. While in God's economy, wealth flows from the rich to the poor, in the neoliberal economy, it flows from the poor to the rich. While the economic index of God's economy is the poor, the neoliberal economic index is the rich. While God's economy is based on God's love and grace, neoliberal economy is

based on greed and profit making. While God's economy is an economy of solidarity, neoliberal economy is an economy based on limitless competition.

The neoliberal economy produces an ongoing flow of sacrifices: sacrifices of the south, so that the north may continue its lifestyle; sacrifices of nature, because the market requires them; sacrifices of ongoing indebtedness of the poor, so that the rich can stay rich and accumulate more and more.

Why a faith stance?

Because the very integrity of faith is in question

Neoliberal ideology claims that the global market will bring about a world which is free of hunger and disease. It uses a theological and ideological framework to justify its presumed messianic role by claiming economic sovereignty, absolute power and authority beyond any regulation, the right to act above national and international law, the right to act beyond ethical and moral rules, that God has blessed prosperity, and that poverty and disease are the results of God's disfavour due to disobedience and laziness.

It demands the sanctity of private property, excessive materialist greed which perverts the human spirit, and the colonization of conscience.

We believe that neoliberal ideology violates the will of God, the creator of the garden of life.

In this historical ideological and theological situation where neoliberal ideology claims absolute power over and against the sovereignty of God and gospel claims, it is critical, for the integrity of our faith, that we take a faith stance. Our Reformed communities have taken such faith stances in the past whenever the sovereignty of God has been undermined and the gospel has been at stake politically, socially and economically (Barmen Declaration 1934; Theological Declaration of Korean Christians 1973; 21st WARC general council, Ottawa 1982; Confession of Belhar 1986).

In line with this history, we, representatives of churches of the Reformed tradition in the south, take a faith stance against neoliberal ideology that compromises the integrity of the Gospel and faith, so that God may be glorified and the promise of abundant life may be fulfilled.

Our faith stance

Study of the Bible shows that in times of profound crisis provoked by the rise of great empires (Babylon, Assyria, Selucedae, and Rome) the authors of scripture (particularly apocalyptic and prophetic writings) held up a vision of hope that God would intervene. This vision formed an alternative way of life in opposition to life defined by the empire. These visions of God's reign give us strength to reject the present imperial power and to look for alternatives to the present organization of life and society, reaffirming messianic reign and declaring God's sovereignty over all of life.

Garden of life

We *reaffirm* that God created the garden of life – political, social, economic and ecological as well as spiritual. (Gen 2.8-9)

We *repent* from idolatry, believing that the empire will bring about the peace and security, and that the power of money will solve all problems.

We repent that the doctrine of creation (Genesis 1) has been used to conquer, dominate, exploit, and destroy life, especially women and the earth, and that we have neglected to care for life which is under the threat of ultimate destruction.

We *reject* any claim of economic, political and military power which subverts God's sovereignty over life.

We reject absolute property of private entity, personal or corporate, for it denies God's sovereign ownership over all things.

We *resist* the power of death in the forms of global economic exclusion, imperial domination and military hegemony which annihilates people and the earth.

We *declare* that God's design for the economy is to sustain the life and wellbeing of all creation.

We worship God, not Mammon which demands limitless sacrifice of life for its existence. We declare that God's sovereign reign means that all creatures are free partners in the whole realm of life.

Covenant with creation

We *reaffirm* that God has made an all-inclusive covenant with all creation (Gen 9.8-12).

This covenant has been sealed by the gift of God's grace, a gift which is not for sale in the market place (Is 55.1). We reaffirm that God made a covenant to liberate from the imperial powers (Babylon and Rome). God's covenant is over and against any contract, which is the "law" of domination and exploitation. It is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are God's primary partners.

We *repent* from believing that Christians have an exclusive relationship with God.

We have excluded people because of their class, race, sex, ethnicity or religion, and in our beliefs about salvation we have excluded people outside the Christian community and also the non-human world.

We *reject* any Christian exclusive claim over God's blessing and protection, and thus, we reject any theological justification for neoliberal ideology and the imperial power.

We *resist* the domination of the global economy, imperial power, military hegemony, and modern science and technology that destroys the wholeness of creation.

We *declare* that God is creator and sustainer of all living beings for their common living.

Unity in Christ through the Spirit

We *reaffirm* that the body of Christ unites the whole cosmos, overcoming all divisions and conflicts.

We reaffirm that the garden of life under a new heaven and a new earth is continually sustained and renewed through the Spirit (Col 1.16-18, Rev 21.1-5).

We *repent* from not recognizing the unity of life in the whole universe in the reign of Christ and the work of the Spirit.

We repent that, in the name of Christ, we have condemned other faiths and spiritualities of the peoples as well as degrading the other creatures.

We repent that by confining the Spirit to the soul, we have justified the ideology of individualism.

We *reject* any doctrine of limitless competition, which is the source of economic, political and social conflicts and violence.

We reject corruption at all levels as an integral part of the system.

We *resist* any power that promotes the logic of the jungle – a new social Darwinism, an ideology that legitimates the survival of the fittest and the victory of the strong over the weak.

We *declare* that the body of Christ is unconditionally and universally an inclusive reality, and that the Spirit is an all pervasive energy in the universe that works for the constant renewal of life.

We commit in covenant

Taking a stance of faith is never without consequences. It is a public matter from the beginning and, thus, may prompt severe counter reactions. Despite this risk of confrontation, even more important, a joint stance of faith creates a new ecumenical space, a space for new public visions, for renewing the economy and for alternative community building. It breaks through the existing closed reality if people commit themselves to cooperation and resistance at local, regional, national, and global levels. Churches should form alliances with civil and social movements, which are also working for the deep changes that are necessary.

The biblical vision of renewal of the economy

It is a lie that there is no alternative to the present form of neoliberal globalization. In fact, this view is a kind of tunnel vision. It is built on the expectation that only the maximum expansion of market-oriented production and trade will bring us to the light of growing wealth and reducing poverty.

The biblical vision is different in the following ways.

- a) It is orientated to the fulfilment of basic needs and blossoming, not to maximum productivity and consumption (Isaiah 65, 1 Timothy 6).
- b) It has care and distribution as its primary force not accumulation (Lk 12.16-21).
- c) It promotes solidarity, serving living communities, and is not individualistic (Acts 4-5).
- d) It subjects finance to the service of the real economy, not the real economy to the rule of the financial markets (Luke 19).
- e) It corrects systemic indebtedness and loss of land by Jubilee measures (Leviticus 25).
- f) It binds the economy to the restraint of ecological respect instead of allowing profits to include ecological destruction (Leviticus 25).

Examples of resistance

1. Church members should participate with peoples' movements in civil disobedience against increasing consumption levels. The richness of sufficiency needs to be relearned, especially by the rich.
2. Church members should resist church investment where financial profit is the key concern, over and against the basic needs of the poor.
3. Churches should press for the democratic redesign of the international financial and economic system, replacing the present institutions (the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization) which are mainly owned by and serve the interests of the rich countries.
4. Churches should not stand on the side of the big land owners but on the side of the small owners and the landless people.

Examples of hope

1. The development of self-supporting agricultural systems through "Integral Mission" where indigenous people cultivate land (Brazil).
2. Banks, which belong to ecumenical organizations make loans available at reasonable rates for lower and middle class people (Indonesia).
3. Watch-persons are appointed to focus on and render services in the areas of health, justice, education, and environment (Cameroon).
4. Corruption is being exposed (Costa Rica).
5. Sensitizing churches on issues of faith and economy, promotion of human rights, justice and peace dialogues (Colombia).
6. Support of the self-management of small producers in urban peripheries and rural areas (Argentina).
7. Practising ecologically sound agriculture.

Covenant for life

In response to a liberating God who made a covenant for life with the whole creation, we declare the following covenant for the life of the whole creation community.

God of life,

you are our God who liberates us from any system of oppression, exclusion and exploitation.

- I. We shall not make Mammon our God, accumulating power and wealth.
- II. We shall not make ourselves an idol, worshipping the effectiveness of our achievements.
- III. We shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord God, calling the implementation of the wealth-accumulating market and imperial wars a Christian policy.
- IV. We will observe the sabbath day by not exploiting human labour and destroying mother earth.
- V. We will provide for solidarity between the generations, not only by securing a decent living for the aged but also by not burdening the coming generations with ecological damage and debt.
- VI. We shall not murder, excluding from the economy those who have no private property nor ability to sell their labour in the market.
- VII. We shall not tolerate the commodification and sexual exploitation of women and children.
- VIII. We shall not allow the manifold robberies of economic and financial actors.
- IX. We shall not misuse the legal system for our personal profit but promote the economic, social and cultural rights of all people.
- X. We shall not follow the greed of limitless accumulation by depriving our neighbours of their means of production and income, so that all may live in dignity on God's rich and beautiful earth.

A prayer for life

God, you are creator, restorer and renewer, you are the one who moulds life, mends life, and moves all creation toward life.

You are, at the very heart of your being, life in abundance.

God you are life.

Creator God, we are grateful for the ways you preserve and sustain your creation:
for the garden of life by which we are nourished and know beauty and wonder,

for rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, mountains and valleys, trees, plants and flowers, insects, fish, birds and animals,

for people – men and women, young and old, brown, black and white.
We celebrate your abundant goodness.

God you are the moulder of life.

Restorer God, we come before you as a penitent church and people,
for our own and the whole world's failings.

We continually fall short of your perfect love, justice, righteousness and
compassion

and we ask for your mercy.

For believing and acting as if your salvation was only for the individual,
instead of for all of creation,

and pointed heavenward

instead of beginning on earth with the wholeness and peace of those people,
species and places most in need of your mending love;

for misinterpreting your word in scripture

and believing and acting as if domination of the earth, women, children
and the poor is the way to faithfulness;

for trusting in the powers;

for believing that the market that we call free will create the personal and
social growth, prosperity and security for which we long;

for our self-justification of accumulation and material excess,

lack of sabbath and attention to life-enhancing activity,

desire for status and recognition,

and neglect of spiritual and worshipful disciplines;

for being drawn into the evil that degrades the earth, disenfranchises the poor,
and encourages us as humans to believe we are privileged beings of God's
creation;

we ask for your mercy and compassion.

God, you are the mender of life.

Renewing God, we ask for your help in rejecting and resisting the powers that
have brought us to this point:

where the weak are systematically excluded from and sacrificed to the global
market;

particular species and the biosphere are destroyed;

the nightmare of suffering and destruction of the poor and the earth is
accelerating at unprecedented speed.

God, you are the mover of life.

Creating, redeeming, renewing God, may this moment be a *kairos*,
where your timing and initiative become ours.

May your Spirit move in and through us and the whole cosmos
so we might be bound to your justice and peace, mercy and compassion in
all our relations with one another and the earth.

Centre us on your truth
that we may know your presence and will in the community of Christ and
earth.

May your hope be our hope, and your vision our vision,
so destruction may be repaired, and death overcome with life.

Amen.

Notes

1. The WARC south-south member churches forum on confessing and covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth (*processus confessionis*), April 22-26 2003, Buenos Aires, Argentina, was attended by representatives from churches in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific, and members of the WARC taskforce on covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth (*processus confessionis*).
2. We are grateful to the ecumenical family, the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Christian Conference of Asia, the Conference of European Churches, the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Latin American Council of Churches as well as the Southern African Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Northeast Asia area council, the European area council, and the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (Aipral), who have been making the journey together through the regional consultations that have taken place in Asia (Seoul and Bangkok 1999), central and eastern Europe (Budapest, 2001), the Pacific (Fiji, 2001), western Europe (Soesterberg 2002), and Latin America (Buenos Aires, 2003).

The time has come

South-north member churches forum
London Colney, UK, February 8-11 2004

The south-north member churches forum in London Colney continued the journey begun by the 23rd general council (Debrecen 1997), which invited member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to enter into a process of “recognition, education, and confession” (*processus confessionis*) regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction. This forum gathered representatives of 26 member churches from the north and south and developed the following faith stance on the way to the 24th general council (Accra 2004).

Why take a faith stance?

There is a growing recognition that the way in which the capitalist market system works today causes the suffering and death of people and creation on a massive scale. Life is at stake; suffering and destruction abound. Hunger and starvation, diseases such as HIV/Aids, social insecurity, and ecological destruction often become opportunities for further profit. The same market forces that victimize the south are at work in the north. The economic and environmental problems are interconnected and aggravate each other in disastrous ways, constantly pushing us away from the God of life and from fullness of life for the whole creation.

Economically, the capitalist market does not serve the exchange of useful goods and services for all, nor is it held politically and socially accountable for the common good. Built on the absolute property rights of a minority of owners and regulated to benefit corporate profit, it has only one goal: to maximize the accumulation of wealth by a few. Financial capital dominates the economy, excludes the poor, fosters speculation, and traps people and nations permanently in debt. Capital goes less and less into the long-range sustainable production of goods and services. Instead, the drive of corporations and the market often causes unemployment, degradation of working conditions, forced migration, and increasing structural indebtedness. Macroeconomic policies such as structural adjustment programmes, privatization, devaluation of local currencies, and cutbacks in social services, imposed on countries by global economic institutions, widen the gap between rich and poor.

Ecologically, creation is in crisis. Nature is seen only as the raw material for consumption and wealth creation. There is no recognition of nature’s intrinsic value or that regular communion with creation is important for our spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing. The unlimited growth policy of industrial economies accelerates the plundering of the earth and the irreversible destruction of the environment. All over the world, the industrialization of

agriculture is driving small farmers out of business. Many species and habitats are being destroyed, and creation as a whole is in peril.

We live in a time of empire – an empire that enforces the current trend of militarism as a global war strategy in order to secure markets and imposes destructive macroeconomic policies on entire countries to serve the ends of the market. The degree to which economic globalization and global geopolitics are integrated today has no historical parallel. Modern science and technology are even used to serve global military power and the global market, rather than to serve life. Structural violence is intensified by racism, caste systems and gender inequalities.

Poverty robs women of the fullness of their humanity. The trafficking of women and children exploits, commodifies, and even enslaves.

In the midst of social, economic and ecological deterioration, plagues and diseases are spreading all over the world, affecting animals as well as people, and hitting the poorest countries in an alarming way. Millions of people die from Aids and too often are deprived of effective medical treatment by profit-oriented pharmaceutical corporations.

The media, increasingly controlled by corporate powers, colonize human consciousness, instilling the consumerist values of the market.

At the heart of today's economic and environmental problems is what is referred to in many parts of the world as neoliberalism, neoliberal capitalism or the Washington Consensus.

This consensus has the core beliefs that

1. competition, consumerism and the unlimited accumulation of wealth are best for the whole world
2. the capitalist market is built on the principle of private property without any social obligation, as well as contract as the only legal basis
3. the practice of liberalizing and deregulating the market, privatization, openness to foreign investment and imports, the unrestricted movement of capital and lower taxes will achieve common wealth.

In fact, the rich and the rich nations use political institutions and military force to secure their own interests and do not follow the practice they require for others.

Neoliberal ideology claims to be without alternative and thus challenges the sovereignty of God, while also demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and from creation. Therefore the integrity of our faith is at stake.

Our faith is at stake because

- suffering and destruction is contrary to the will of God, who created life and conquered death through Jesus Christ
- neoliberal capitalism makes the false promise that it can save the world
- neoliberal capitalism claims sovereignty over life and demands an allegiance that amounts to idolatry.

The integrity of our faith is at stake

As people who belong to the God of life we have been given a new vision, the biblical vision of the fullness of life for people and the earth. We commit ourselves to this biblical vision, which is opposed to neoliberal capitalism in the following ways:

- a) It is oriented to the fulfilment of basic needs and human flourishing, not to maximum productivity and consumption (Isaiah 65, 1 Timothy 6).
- b) It has care and distribution as its driving force, not accumulation (Lk 12.16-21).
- c) It promotes solidarity, serving living communities, and rejecting individualism (Acts 4-5).
- d) It subjects financial markets to the service of the real economy, not the real economy to the rule of finance (Luke 19).
- e) It corrects systematic indebtedness and the loss of land by jubilee measures and constrains the economy to respect the environment, instead of allowing the search for profits to destroy it (Leviticus 25).
- f) It creates a space where justice and peace will kiss (Ps 85.10), instead of subjecting every space – physical, mental, and spiritual – to the ends of the market.

We are challenged as churches to make a confession of faith because we have listened to the cries of suffering people and the groaning of creation. This confession of faith will reject the injustices of today's global economy by reaffirming our faith in the triune God who opens up a new creation in Christ and calls us to respond faithfully to God's covenant.

We affirm that God is sovereign over all creation (Gen 2.8-9)

We repent of the belief that the market economy and the power of money will bring about peace, security and freedom from hunger and disease. We repent of the misuse of the doctrine of creation (Genesis 1) to conquer, exploit and destroy life – especially women and the earth – misinterpreting our role as stewards of creation. We repent of the belief that neoliberal capitalism is the solution to the world's problems.

We reject any claim of economic, political and military power that subverts God's sovereignty over life. We reject the cooption by large capital owners of the gifts of God, given to all people, as absolute property for private profit at the expense of the common good, because this denies God's sovereign ownership over all things. We reject the idea that humankind has an unrestricted right to dominate and conquer nature.

We declare that God's design is to sustain all creation. We declare that God's sovereign reign means that all creatures are endowed by God with dignity and are to live in companionship with one another.

We affirm that God has made a covenant with all creation (Gen 9.8-12)
This covenant has been sealed by the gift of God's grace, a gift that is not for sale in the market place (Is 55.1). God's covenant is over and against any contract that is the "law" of domination and exploitation. It is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are in a preferential way God's partners. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant.

We repent of our complicity with neoliberal capitalism, which excludes the poor and vulnerable from the fullness of life. We repent of our excluding people because of their class, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.

We reject the misuse of the biblical idea of God's covenant by any group or nation to exclude others on ideological or political grounds. We reject military, political, and economic domination. We reject the ideological and political misuse of Scripture and Christian faith to justify any form of domination.

We declare that God's covenant invites all creation into a relationship of participation in common living. We declare that God gives us the freedom to build, preserve, and care for all creation (Genesis 2, 1 Cor 10.23-26).

We affirm that in Christ all divisions and exclusions are overcome. There is unity of life in community, among nations and in the cosmos (Eph 2.11-21)

We repent of not recognizing the unity of life in the whole universe through the reign of Christ and the presence of the Spirit. We repent of degrading people of other faiths and spiritualities in the name of Christ. We repent of breaking the body of Christ through divisions and schisms.

We reject unlimited competition and the cynical social doctrine of the survival of the fittest.

We declare that the body of Christ is called to be, unconditionally and universally, an inclusive reality.

We affirm that the Holy Spirit gives us a vision for a new heaven and a new earth

The Holy Spirit continually renews and sustains the vision of the garden of life in a new heaven and a new earth (Col 1.16-18, Rev 21.1-5). The Spirit moves us into fellowship with one another and towards hope for a new vision based on love, forgiveness and transformation in Jesus Christ.

We repent of not being sensitive to and trusting in the life-giving, transforming power of the Holy Spirit and therefore limiting our vision of justice, peace and hope for the world. We repent of justifying the ideology of individualism by confining the Spirit to the soul.

We reject the view of modernity that privileges the material over the spiritual. We reject the market's drive to dominate all of life through materialism and consumerism.

We declare that the Holy Spirit is working in all creation, inspiring, renewing and transforming life.

Covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth

The Alliance fellowship has been led by the Holy Spirit to a time and place where a choice must be made, a stance must be taken. Churches can no longer remain lukewarm in responding to the suffering and destruction of people and the earth. Now is the time for churches to proclaim with passion that we will commit our time and energy, indeed, our very selves, to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth.

We, as the church of Jesus Christ, oppose

- maximum productivity, consumption and accumulation to serve the ends of individuals and corporations at the expense of the poor and creation;
- the use of the military to promote the market mechanisms;
- the misuse of the Bible to oppress people and the earth, and to support the goals of the current economic ideology;
- the unjust applications of tariffs and subsidies;
- corporate activity that utilizes unjust labour policies in order to maximize profits;
- the consolidation of agriculture that drives small farmers out of business;
- structural adjustment programmes that create unemployment and exploit the environment;
- the destabilization of economies through unregulated currency speculation;
- unpayable levels of international debt;
- the idea that there is no alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

We, as the church of Jesus Christ, confess and repent

- of falling short in responding to the urgent cries of the poor and creation;
- of not speaking prophetically against the powers that oppress and enslave;
- of failing to lift up a biblical vision of the economy as opposed to the current market vision;
- of giving in, especially in countries in the north, to materialism and over-consumption.

We, as the church of Jesus Christ, are called to

- support economic activity that promotes sustainable communities and ecosystems;
- work for the release of systematic indebtedness where it enslaves people and countries;
- support governments in protecting their people and markets and developing infrastructure, healthcare, and education in locally appropriate ways;

- work for rigorous and internationally enforceable pollution controls;
- advocate the upholding of universal human rights;
- promote the protection of workers' rights;
- strive for multilateral and unilateral disarmament and peace;
- make significant contributions to environmental protection and preservation;
- promote sustainable investment that gives consideration to the poor and the environment;
- adopt lifestyles that witness to God's economy for life;
- create faith stances and continue with the process of recognition, education and confession regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction within our own churches.

We, as the church of Jesus Christ, and as a sign of hope, reaffirm our commitment to work with

- national, regional and global ecumenical bodies and faith communities to covenant for justice in the economy and the earth;
- civil, peoples' and citizens' movements in the struggle for justice;
- groups who work for alternatives in order to build a sustainable economy and environment (eg the Fair Trade and Just Trade movement).

We pray

We praise you, O God, for your creation; for the diversity of humankind; for the provision you have made for the sustenance of life throughout the earth; for the interconnectedness of creation; for the privilege you have granted us to play a role as stewards in sustaining creation.

We confess, O God, that we have not always recognized our place in creation, as people created by you to be in companionship with one another and the earth. Help us to be instruments of renewal and restoration and not of destruction. We repent of our fears, inconsistencies and weaknesses in responding to your call.

We pray, O God, for the vulnerable who are negatively affected by ecological and economic injustice and ask that you give them the strength and resources to rise above their situations.

Grant your church, O God, in the midst of the forces of evil and death, the power to truly represent your voice and to work with you as partners in bringing about life in all its fullness. *Amen.*

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