

REFORMED FAITH AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE**WARC-SAARC Consultation, 12-17 October 1995
Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, Kitwe, Zambia****INTRODUCTION**

A Southern African regional consultation on the theme 'Reformed Faith and Economic Justice' was convened by the Southern Africa Alliance of Reformed Churches under the sponsorship of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. This was the second consultation on this theme held in preparation for the WARC 23rd General Council in Debrecen, Hungary, in August 1997. It was attended by 26 participants, mainly from WARC member churches in Southern Africa. The following churches and institutions were represented: Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed Church in Botswana, Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa, Igreja Evangélica de Cristo em Moçambique, Igreja Evangélica Reformada de Angola, Justo Mwale Theological College, Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, Reformed Church in Zambia, Reformed Church in Zimbabwe, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Equatorial Guinea, Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, United Church of Zambia, United Church of Zambia Theological College, United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (Namibia Regional Council), Volkskerk van Afrika, University of the Western Cape (Bellville, South Africa), University of Cape Town, University of South Africa (Pretoria) and WARC (Dr Milan Opo_enský).

The consultation was held at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation from 12 to 17 October, 1995. On Saturday, October 14, the participants were invited to St Margaret's Church (United Church of Zambia) in Kitwe for a cultural evening. The consultation is very grateful to the WARC member churches in Zambia, the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, the United Church of Zambia Theological College, the people of St Margaret's Church and many other people for their invaluable help and assistance. WARC deserves special thanks for sponsoring this consultation and other SAARC programmes.

Participants in the consultation included a politician, an economist, an attorney, a business woman, and a university student, as well as church leaders and academic staff. The economic, social, political, ethical and theological aspects of the theme, 'Reformed Faith and Economic Justice', were studied from an African perspective. This working paper is the result of Bible studies, lectures, working groups and plenary discussions. It deals with the theme in three sections: seeing, judging and acting.

SEEING

1. The history of Africa is a bitter one, characterized by colonialism, slavery, racism, sexism and repressive labour practices. In some countries of our region, white people controlled and still control large parts of the economy. This economy was based on enforced racial division in every sphere. Every sphere of life in Southern Africa—economic, social, legal, political, moral, cultural, environmental—was and is affected.
2. What we in the Southern African region see is the systematic exclusion of Africa from the world economy. Large parts of Africa have already been declared dead as far as the global economic map and the global economic plans of the G-7 group of countries are concerned.

3. Our people's dreams and hopes of social equality, political freedom and economic justice, which were kindled at the time of independence 30 years ago, have turned into a long and harrowing winter of despair. After all the serious and concerted efforts to pool our energy, intellect and know-how in order to lift ourselves up from poverty and neglect, the condition of our hard-working people and nations has worsened rather than improved.
4. The overwhelming majority of our people is becoming poorer and poorer and their material condition is deteriorating fast. We begin to understand something of the all-pervasive power of the global economy, of the almost untouchable structures of production, distribution and consumption of material goods and services. We discover that global economic world-views contain a hidden premise: that peoples from the South have no right to their own labour; they have to be subservient to market forces. This has led to our enslavement to our own products, and to the powerlessness of our congregations and our churches.
5. Our ethnic and national cultures have lost the power to inform our economic practices because they have been turned into commodities in the service of an economy with a different goal. Those elements that could not be commodified are gradually disappearing under the weight of imported powerful western cultures. Cultural homogenization is the order of the day as all cultural boundaries fall to a commodity culture in which everything can be bought and sold. Cultures survive only as long as they promote the interests of the market.
6. Instead of political freedom and national autonomy, our national states are losing the power to protect the democracy and economic autonomy for which we have struggled so long and paid so dearly. Multinational companies usurp the democratic will of most of the people in Africa by coercing our governments to remove desperately needed protection from fragile enterprises. Small emerging local enterprises and co-operatives need state protection from unfair competition by giant foreign companies. When such protection is not forthcoming, they are often pushed out of existence. Those who cry out are told that they should compete and succeed and that, if they do not succeed, then they do not deserve to exist.
7. Our general and pervasive experience is that, instead of rivers of economic prosperity and justice flowing season after season in all Africa, poverty and misery, hunger and chronic unemployment have become endemic. Again, we notice that it is because money flows from the poor South to the rich North to enrich the North still further.
8. The systematic impoverishment of Africa has led many people to lose their capacity for self-help and self-employment. This may have disastrous repercussions on future generations.
9. The irony is that Africa is dying at a time when the accumulated global wealth, to which we and our parents have handsomely contributed, is larger than ever before in the history of humankind, due to the unprecedentedly high development of technology and know-how. It is tragic that the mass hunger we see every day coexists in the global context side by side with immeasurable opulence, without tearing apart the consciences of those who are beneficiaries.
10. According to Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange, two Dutch economists, these paradoxes are found even at the heart of the industrialized countries of Northern Europe and America, as well as in the six 'Tiger' nations of Asia. They contend that no nation has been able to eradicate the intolerable coexistence of the mass availability of commodities (overproduction) and scarcity, of poverty and wealth, of the need for more labour and constantly rising unemployment, of

the fast emergence of new cities and homelessness, of the highest developed health-care systems and the rapid spread of epidemic diseases.¹

JUDGING

1. We recognize that the relationship between economy and faith is not obvious. This is largely due, however, to the impersonal and abstract way in which the global economy operates and is often presented. (It is also often presented in a pseudo-religious form, with unmistakable messianic claims.) Economics is not merely about goods and markets. It is about human beings and how they choose to relate to each other.

¹ Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange, *Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Toward an Economy of Care* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans and Geneva: WCC, 1995).

2. In the 16th century, the emerging market economy enjoyed John Calvin's blessing. He saw it as a system that developed naturally from human ingenuity, and had the potential to 'spread God's bounty throughout society' while still remaining within human control and criticism. Today, the global market economy has been sacralized, and elevated to an imperial throne. It has changed places with the human beings who created it. By redefining what it means to be human, it has become the creator of human beings. Thereby it usurps the sovereignty of God, claiming a freedom that belongs to God alone. For us as Christians, this raises the question of idolatry and of loyalty to God or mammon.
3. The idolatrous and dehumanizing nature of the contemporary global economy is seen in the exclusion of Africa and Africans from the human family. This denial of our humanity (by cutting us off from the human family) is a direct contradiction of the faith that we were created by God in God's image.
4. A few nations in the world have accumulated power which they use to deprive other nations of their sovereignty. This they do while professing to stand for democratic rights. They have become the sole human agents, who elevate themselves above other nations and negate the agency of their fellow human beings. Thereby they undermine what John Calvin saw as the ultimate goal of human economic activity, namely, to 'promote mutual intercourse among human beings'.
5. There is a dishonesty at the heart of economic globalization. Labour is excluded from the process. The unhampered movement of commodities and capital is encouraged, but that of labour is discouraged. The labour market is not liberalized or globalized—because that market consists of poor people in Africa as well as other continents of the South.
6. Those who manage the world economy often talk of the 'sacrifices' that must be made. We are the victims they have in mind. All the signs of the times lead us to conclude that Africans live on a crucified continent as people to be sacrificed. Our humanity and the future of our children are of no consequence to the global economy. Almost all the powers in the world are ranged against us: the oligarchies, the multinational corporations and various armed forces. In some countries of our region, even democratically elected governments knowingly or unknowingly subvert the emergence of a just economy.
7. The sacrifice of humanity on the altar of the global economy is intertwined with the sacrifice of nature. This is especially clear in the southern hemisphere, which the North regards as a legitimate dumping ground for its toxic waste. Nature is being destroyed in the false belief that powerful human beings have been given dominion over nature, to do with it as they please. The voice of those who speak in defence of nature has been drowned by the loud proponents of unlimited economic growth. Now we see the consequences of such limitless growth: the weak guardians of nature have become its victims, along with nature itself.
8. The global economy has invented or produced almost everything—except justice, solidarity, peace and humaneness. The West's scientific and technological knowledge, its political democracy and Judaeo-Christian traditions, and the power it has amassed in its government, its enterprises, its universities and its churches, have not been sufficient to create a just and humane economy. For justice, solidarity and humanity we are thrown back on the gospel of the poor of the Bible, the Reformed concern for mutuality and equality in economic systems, and our own cultural and traditional African resources of community and *ubuntu*.

9. As African Reformed churches we must confess our sins of omission. In the past we did not resist enough. We are now challenged to choose between a coerced allegiance to mammon or the faithful worship of God. We cannot follow Christ in living for others and at the same time pay allegiance to the sovereign claims of the global economy. We cannot profess to be Christian and not act to break the chains of economic injustice.
10. It is our painful conclusion that the African reality of poverty caused by an unjust economic world order has gone beyond an ethical problem and become a theological one. It now constitutes a *status confessionis*. The gospel to the poor is at stake in the very mechanism of the global economy today.

ACTING

1. We need a collective effort by SAARC to address the global, regional and national threats to economic justice faced by our people. We call on our member churches to accept the challenge to become more vigilantly a church of the poor bringing good news to the impoverished African masses.
2. We need to promote an alternative economic practice that is guided by the needs of human beings in the form of the preferential protection of the poor, and respect for nature. Such an economic practice should be informed by the sovereignty of God and the principles of the Kingdom of God. It will embrace African cultural values like *ubuntu* (community) over against individualism, unequal competition and exploitation.
3. We call upon governments in the region to address the desperate plight of our people as a matter of urgency. Our churches are prepared to engage with our governments in collective action to address the situation.
4. We call upon WARC to consider our submission that a *status confessionis* be declared in the light of the African theological experience.
5. We urge WARC to have a pre-conference on economic justice of member churches from countries of the Southern hemisphere to advise the 23rd General Council in Debrecen, Hungary in 1997. Such a pre-conference should:
 - (a) address the expendability of the continent of Africa in the context of global economic planning;
 - (b) discuss the development of an action plan around the jubilee motif regarding the debt of the South;
 - (c) consider the calling of a confessing movement of the churches of the South and others who are in solidarity with them.
6. We affirm life against death. We have to share the dream of a just society, and refuse to let it die. We proclaim the Triune God as the God of life, of creation, of care, of hope. 'We believe that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that in a world full of injustice and enmity he is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that he calls his church to *follow* him in this.' (Confession of Belhar)