THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON THE POOR

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 One can hardly think of a topic that would be more relevant to the conference to which we have been invited than the topic that we have before us: The impact of globalization on the poor. Before the subject is discussed, however, the attempt has to be made to reach a common agreement on the meaning of globalization—a term that for many people stands for a curse while for many others stands for a blessing. Or could it be that the phenomenon to which the term refers may be interpreted as a curse or as a blessing, depending on its impact on people living under different circumstances? If that is the case, the first thing that needs to be said here is that globalization is an ambiguous term.

1.2 The ambiguity remains as long as globalization is interpreted as a neutral phenomenon—simply the process through which multiple aspects of the natural, cultural, social, economic, and political reality that conform the milieu of human life have become interconnected in such a way that what happens or is done in one place is known by people in other places around the globe. Viewed from this perspective, globalization is experienced more than anything else in terms of a sort of planetary consciousness—the sense that a growing number of people all over the world seem to have of belonging to one world, as portrayed by the media. Perhaps a more appropriate term for it would be internationalization.

1.3 The ambiguity of globalization is dispelled, however, when it is recognized that the dominant form of globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the globalization of so-called neo-liberal capitalism. According to Leslie Sklair (2002:8), capitalist globalization, which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, is “a particular way of organizing social life across existing state borders” and includes three inter-related transnational elements or (as he calls them) “practices”:

1) the transnational corporation, “the major locus of transnational economic practices”;  
2) the transnational capitalist class, “the major locus of transnational political practices”, and  
3) the transnational culture-ideology of consumerism, “the major locus of transnational culture-ideology practices.”

The primary moving force of today’s economic global system is the transnational capitalist class—made up of globalizing bureaucrats, politicians, and professionals—that, according to Sklair (9), “derives its material base from the transnational corporations... and the value system of the culture-ideology of consumerism” and engages in “practices that cross [national] borders but do not originate with state actors, agencies, or institutions.” All the evidence seems to point to the conclusion that, “Global capitalism, driven by the TNCs [transnational corporations], organized politically through the transnational political class, and fueled by the culture-ideology of consumerism, is the most potent force for change in the world today” (47). The threat to democracy that this form of globalization represents has eloquently been brought out by George Soros, himself a successful capitalist, who
writes:

"Although I have made a fortune in the financial markets, I now fear that the untrammeled intensification of laissez-faire capitalism and the spread of market values into all areas of life is endangering our open and democratic society. The main enemy of the open society, I believe, is no longer the communist but the capitalist threat" (1997:45).

1.5 Since that article was written in 1997, the capitalist global system has shown to be the greatest threat not only to democracy but also to the environment and to the very survival of humankind and especially of the poor around the globe. Without denying the positive aspects of other forms of globalization, Christians are under obligation to pay special attention to the negative impact of the capitalist economic system on the poor. In the first part of this paper we will examine the basic assumptions that lie behind the sort of globalization which is causing poverty and deprivation to a high percentage of the population all over the world, including the industrialized countries. In the second part we will look at the main dimensions of this phenomenon. Finally, in the third part we will outline the kind of response to globalization that, from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, is expected of people committed to integral mission.

2 THE BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF CAPITALIST GLOBALIZATION

2.1 The well-known Indian economist Amartya Sen has argued that the phenomenon of globalization is neither of Western origin nor new. For thousands of years, he claims, globalization has made a valuable contribution to world progress through different means, including science and technology. The difference is that in the past the expansion of science, technology and mathematics went from the East from the West, rather than from the West to the East. Thus, for instance, in the year 1000 A. D., inventions of high technology, such as gunpowder, paper, the printing press, the arch, the compass, and the mill wheel were common in China and practically unknown in other parts of the world, but globalization took them all over, including Europe. The decimal system was developed in India between the second and sixth centuries, then used by Arabian mathematicians and finally taken to Europe in the last quarter of the tenth century, where it played an important role in the scientific revolution which transformed that continent. Today, says the distinguished economist, the same globalization principle is in operation; it now has the West as its expansion center, but it must not be interpreted as an essentially Western phenomenon nor discarded as the cause of poverty around the world.

2.2 Amartya Sen’s point with regards to the reality of globalization in the past is well taken, but the fact remains that never before in human history has there been an economic system as extensive in its geographical outreach and as deep in its influence on multiple areas of life as today’s capitalist global system. The changes that this system has produced and

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continues to produce in human life and in the ecology of the planet Earth are so radical that there is no exaggeration in saying that humankind is definitely entering into an unprecedented global era. As Saskia Sassen has written, “over the last fifteen years we can see a profoundly different phase [of globalization], one where national economies are less and less a unitary category in the face of the new forms of globalization” (1998: xix).

2.3 In view of the predominant role of capitalism in this new era, a correct understanding of what is going on in the world in general and in the nation-states in particular, which affects the poor, requires an analysis of the basic assumptions of the global capitalist system. No full discussion of this subject is here possible, but the assumptions can easily be recognized in the arguments employed by the advocates of global capitalism in defense of their position.

2.4 The most common assumption is that the integration of the local economies into the global capitalist system is the door that leads to economic progress—it benefits the industrialized as well as the “developing countries”, the consumers as well as the producers, and it fosters competition by spreading technological knowledge, thus raising the level of productivity and profit-maximization everywhere. Such integration involves the removal of barriers to the free flow of trade and capital, which will in turn set limits to the role of the government and reduce the possibility of corruption, stagnation, and bureaucracy—the evils that have hindered the growth of “developing economies”. This orthodox recipe for economic growth through the free market—“the invisible hand”—is spelled out in the so-called Washington Consensus, promoted by the United States, and enforced by international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. It is supposed to provide the solution to worldwide poverty—if faithfully applied, even the poor countries will eventually become a part of the “First World” and their people will be able to experience the joys of living in the consumer society.

2.5 The most basic assumptions of capitalist globalization may be interpreted as an expression of modernity and modernization. There is general agreement among historians and philosophers that modernity took shape beginning in the seventeenth century as a response to the deep social and economic crisis that affected Europe at that time. Rene Descartes, for instance, laid the basis for the construction of a new “city of man” through pure human reason. Thomas Hobbes interpreted society as a continual process of eagerness, rivalry and acquisition, and opened the door to the necessary analysis for the political regulation of human behavior. Later on John Locke proposed that what is useful for society can be seen as also morally good, thus laying the basis for Utilitarianism. That was the beginning in Europe for the “modern” rationalistic approach to thinking and acting, which started with the individual person but was also seen as having the potential for the reconstruction of human society.

2.6 Goudzwaard and de Santa Ana have summarized the basic characteristics of this approach in three principles:

1) The Galileo-Descartes principle of *the primacy of the mathematical method*, which implies the possibility to reduce physics (nature) to a series of calculated entities and is directly linked with the operational or instrumental side of modernity.

2) The Hobbes-Rousseau principle of *social-constructive rationality*, which regards natural law as the basis for a logical (re)construction of human society.

3) The Locke-Spinoza principles of *individual freedom and equality*, which started from
the recognition of individual rights—including private property—but were also related to a positive evaluation of *self-interest*.

Eventually modernity and individual freedom came to be regarded as two sides of a same coin and found their way into the United States Declaration of Independence, into the new French Constitution, and into the structuring of economic life, for which Adam Smith laid the scientific basis. A further step was taken later on by Jeremy Bentham, the first thinker who used a mathematical method to check all types of social reconstruction with the motto, “the maximum happiness for the greatest number”, thus relating the ordering of society to the fulfillment of human wishes as the ultimate goal.

2.7 These Enlightenment principles became the basic assumptions of the ideology of modernity, which have permeated the Western spirit throughout the last three centuries. It was taken for granted that a rational approach would lead to socio-economic reconstruction; that the mathematical-mechanical method was the way to attain economic efficiency; that autonomous will and individual self-determination were the main actors in economic development; and that utilitarian intervention in society is to be encouraged as long as it promotes the (material) well-being of all. On this basis, freedom and welfare became the political goals to be achieved not only in private but also in public life. Moreover, the relative rise in the standards of living and the achievements of science and technology led people to believe in the inevitability of progress—knowledge was increasing and, provided that the principles were faithfully applied, it would result in improvements in every area of human life. In time, this faith in progress through economy, science, and technology was firmly established and found its way into a modernization program.

2.8 A case can be made to interpret today’s phenomenon of capitalist globalization as a new stage in the process of the modernization of the world. Sklair objects to this interpretation because, from his perspective, it is largely based on the distinction between the traditional and the modern. According to him,

> The central idea of the [modernization] theory is that development revolves around the question of attitudes and values (rather than the material interests entailed in capitalist expansionism). Traditional societies are run by traditionally minded individuals, typically those who are inward looking, not prepared to innovate, and influenced by magic and religion, while modern societies are run by modern-minded individuals, outward looking, keen to try new things, influenced by rational thought and practical experience (2002:31).

In his perceptive analysis of contemporary globalization, however, this author argues that the global capitalist system depends to a large extent on “the central messages [that] come from those who own and control [i.e., the members of the transnational class, to use his own terminology] the major corporations” (106). He places these “central messages” within the framework of “the culture-ideology of consumerism” which, according to him, “transforms all the mass media and their contents into opportunities to sell ideas, values, products, in short, a consumer world-view” (108). It thus becomes obvious that in his own understanding of capitalist globalization ideas, values, and word-views play a role just as important as the one they play in the modernization view of globalization. The fact of the matter is that the basic assumptions of the “transnational culture-ideology of consumerism” have their roots in modernity: the members of the “transnational class” who “own and control the major corporations” are direct descendants of the Enlightenment, and the “transnational corporations” are the latest and most sophisticated embodiment of assumptions that took shape in Europe before the eighteenth century.
2.9 There is plenty of evidence, however, to demonstrate that the time when such assumptions could be taken for granted is over. Far from reducing poverty, the capitalist global system built on these assumptions has become the main contributing factor in the extension and deepening of this major scourge. Indeed, the net result of the free market formula is what Leslie Sklair has called a “class polarization”—the emergence of a transnational aristocracy of materially wealthy and politically powerful people over against increasing masses of poor and deprived people unable to satisfy their basis needs everywhere. The widening gap not only between rich and poor countries but also between the rich and the poor within countries, including those belonging to the First World, clearly shows that the global capitalist system benefits the rich minority but locks the poor majority into poverty.

3 THE DIMENSIONS OF GLOBALIZATION

3.1 In his prophetic book, *Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society* (1979), the Dutch economist Bob Goudzwaard described Western society as a system of progress* affected by three vulnerabilities:

1) The ecological vulnerability, made evident the pollution of soil, water, and air, the extinction of numerous species of plants and animals, and the decreasing availability of raw materials and energy as well as of cultivated land to feed the growing world population.

2) The economic vulnerability, demonstrated by inflation and “structural unemployment”, under an economic system which has become "imbalanced and top heavy" (136), with an ethics that has been "placed in the service of economic expansion" (139).

3) The human vulnerability, shown by the way in which people are pressured to accept continual adjustment to the external and obtrusive demands made on life—“its style, tempo, and direction” (150) even with regard to sports, sexual life, and leisure time. People are forever in search of excitement, sensation, and thrills (149).

According to Goudzwaard, the society marked by these vulnerabilities is a "tunnel society" —a society in which everything—people, institutions, norms, behaviour — contributes to the smooth advance toward the light at the end of the tunnel. But the end of the tunnel never appears to be within reach; the light shines forever in the future. Nevertheless, it keeps everything and everyone in the tunnel on the move (183) — on the move toward "continued economic, technological, and scientific development which we equate with

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2° The *Washington Post* carried an article on March, 1998, saying that the richest of the US population possesses more wealthy than the total wealth of 90% of the total population. The bottom 25% of US families witnessed a 9% decline in income between 1979 and 1995, with the richest 25% of families enjoying a 26% increase during the period, according to a *USA Today* report in 1997. The income of the richest 5% of families was 5.7 times that of the bottom 20% of families in 1995. Official statistics released in 1997 show that the top 20% of US families shared 49% of the country’s total income in 1996, with the income level for the bottom 20% falling by 1.8%. The current level of the top 20% of the population is nine times more than the figure for the bottom 20%, up significantly from the 3.5 times figure in 1979. In addition, some 75% of American workers earn less today than in 1979. 16% of the US population lived below the poverty line in 1974, with the figure rising to 19% in 1997." (Leslie Sklair 2002:53)
social liberty and cultural advance" (185). This is a society, says Goudzwaard, in which faith in progress plays a fundamental role, but in which, at the same time, "Our progress has become our problem. The tunnel has become our trap" (ibid.).

3.2 Since the publication of Capitalism and Progress, Goudzwaard has returned to the analysis of the problems of Western society, with particular emphasis on those related to economy and ecology. In Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Toward an Economy of Care (1995), co-authored with Harry de Lange, the former Professor of the Free University of Amsterdam outlines six paradoxes that show that the economic problems which affect the industrialized nations have become structural:

1) The Scarcity Paradox: "Our society, a society of unprecedented wealth, experiences unprecedented scarcity" (2);
2) The Poverty Paradox: "Poverty is rising sharply in the midst of wealthy societies"(3);
3) The Care Paradox: "In the midst of more wealth, we have fewer opportunities to practice care than before" (4);
4) The Labour Paradox: "Our society’s need for more labor is becoming critical even as unemployment rises"(ibid.);
5) The Health Paradox: "Even though our level of health care has increased, our level of disease is rising" (5); and
6) The Time Paradox: "Despite substantially more wealth, we have less and less time in our lives" (5). For Goudzwaard and de Lange, these are "new, bewildering, and seemingly inexplicable developments" unfolding in today’s economy (2).

One does not have to be an economist to recognize the essential validity of this diagnosis of Western society. Each of these six paradoxes is at the very heart of the industrialized countries and there is plenty of evidence to show its consequences. Already in the middle of the 1970s, Alvin Toffler saw the signs of what he called the "depression of the future", involving the breakdown of the industrial society and the birth of a new civilization (1975). Today’s paradoxes show that the society which he predicted has arrived—"a wholly new and dramatically different social order: a super-industrial civilization that will be technological, but no longer industrial" (3). Conventional economists are totally unable to explain, even less to cope with today’s “schizophrenic economy, one that has lost touch with reality” (1). As Toffler put it, "Nothing in the history of traditional industrial societies has prepared them (or us) for today’s high speed world of instant communication, Eurodollars, petrodollars, multinational corporations, and ganglia-like international banking consortia" (5).

3.3 No analysis of Western society, however, is complete if it does not take into account the role that material wealth plays in the free-market economy not only in the industrialized countries but all over the world today. Built on the assumption that economics is a positive, neutral, value-free science dealing with questions of production, consumption, income, and money in the market, the global economic system is almost totally oriented to the accumulation of wealth rather than to the satisfaction of basic human needs. According to Goudzwaard and de Lange, this system has as a result neglected at least four fronts: economic needs, nature and the environment, economic accountability, and labour. "Neoclassical economics was not designed to help these problems" (59). Wealth for the sake of wealth is the motto. The profit motive takes precedence over the subsistence motive; labour and raw materials are mere commodities. Under the rule of Mammon, the world is deeply affected by ecological, economic, and human vulnerabilities. It has become a "global casino" (Toffler 1975:1), one of whose fundamental characteristics is The inability
3.4 This last statement by Toffler points to one of the main marks of the present-day capitalist global system: "transnational economic realities" which transcend "national regulatory mechanisms". The institutional forms of these realities are transnational corporations, banks, and international financial institutions whose economic practices transcend national boundaries. In the Latin American countries we are painfully aware that, whether we like it or not, we are part of a world economic system over which our nation-states and their governments have very little control or none at all. To speak of globalization today is basically to speak of "transnational economic realities" that decisively condition human life all over the world on both an individual and a community basis. What has been globalized is, in fact, the so-called neo-liberal capitalist system with the industrialized countries as its center. The transnationalization of productive, trading, and monetary capital has transformed the planet into a world market oriented toward the accumulation of capital for the benefit of what Sklair has called a “transnational class”—a small powerful minority who are able to define national policies according to their economic interests, with total disregard for the basic needs of the population. “With the transnational finance markets as the agents of the owners of money assets, the capitalist market economy has made significant progress towards its goal of running world society as an appendage to self-regulating markets” (Duchrow 1995:71).

3.5 If anything is clear today, it is that the solution that politicians, under the control of, or in connivance with, the wealthy minority, are trying to implement in the face of the paradoxes posed by the present global economic system is simply not working. At the root of the solution they propose is the assumption that economic problems are to be solved by letting the market of goods and services function freely, in conformity with the principle of competition. In practice, in a society characterized by a stark imbalance of power, the unavoidable result of competition is that the strong become stronger and the weak become weaker. In economic terms, the rich become richer, and the poor become poorer. That this is, in fact, what is happening does not need to be demonstrated here. There is an overwhelming quantity of published evidence to show the devastating effects that "savage capitalism" is having on the poor sectors of the population not only in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but also in the wealthy countries; and not only on people, but also on the environment.

The most dramatic effect of the global market economy has been the emergence of a new division of society that throws into relief a new “class polarization”—the polarization between rich and poor, which becomes most visible in the Two-thirds World. At the top of the social ladder are “the elect” who benefit from the system—the owners of financial assets, the market consumers par excellence. To them Toffler refers in the following terms:

Multinational corporate executives, bankers, and money people are not sinister characters out of some Pravda cartoon. They are not all spies and

3 According to Sklair, this “class” is transnational in at least five senses: "Its members tend to share global as well as local economic interests; they seek to exert economic control in the work place, political control in domestic and international politics, and culture-ideology control in everyday life; they tend to have global rather than local perspectives on a variety of issues; they tend to be people from many countries, more and more of whom begin to consider themselves citizens of the world as well as of their places of birth, and they tend to share similar lifestyles, particularly patterns of luxury consumption of goods and services" (2002:28-29).
counter-revolutionary saboteurs as the T&T role in Chile suggests. They are simply investors, managers, and planners taking advantage of the world's biggest loophole [the lack of adequate regulations for global corporations]—and upsetting the world economy in the process (78).

3.6 At the bottom of the social scale are "the excluded"—the increasing mass of people whose role with regard to the market is limited to that of (largely uninformed) spectators. They are excluded from the market, although not from society, because they are regarded as totally redundant in relation to the national and international financial transactions that take place at the top of the economic system. They are the first to suffer the consequences of drastic budgetary reductions in education, health, housing, social security, retirement programs, etc., imposed by the power holders. Unable to cover their basic needs, they pay the so-called Asocial cost" of macro-economic development. They are the victims that the system sets aside for the human sacrifice required by the "idolatry of the market"! (Assmann and Hinkelammert 1989).

3.7 A few years ago it was often said that, by selling their raw materials to the wealthy, the poor countries were mortgaging their future. Under the present capitalist global system their predicament has worsened to the point that there is no exaggeration in saying that no longer do the poor have a future to mortgage, for their future has been sold to the wealthy together with their present. Add to this the obvious ecological unsustainability of this perverse economic system, and one cannot avoid raising the question as to how it is possible that the myth should persist that laissez-faire capitalism has the potential of leading the whole world into an era of bonanza in which “the maximum happiness for the greatest number” will be attained. The answer lies in what Sklair has aptly denominated the “transnational culture-ideology of consumerism”, effectively spread all over the world through the mass media (2002:108-115). In fact, the mass media today play a predominant role in creating a global consciousness but also in facilitating the wide acceptance of the values of the consumer society, including the priority of money and material things in all areas of life. When public opinion is subjected to manipulation on the part of big economic interests, questions of public education, health, housing and ecological sustainability are indefinitely postponed for the sake of profit-maximization and economic growth. To this end, the mass media make a qualitative difference with regard to the way in which power is today exercised by the powerful.

4 THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO GLOBALIZATION

4.1 The result of our critical analysis of the globalization of capitalism may be the feeling that nothing can be done with regard to the problems that this form of globalization has created, especially the polarization between rich and poor and the destruction of the ecosystem. This feeling of helplessness, combined with the common assumption that “there is no alternative” to the capitalist system, may be the main reason why so many people, Christian and non-Christians, who recognize the negative impact of global capitalism on life on planet Earth abstain from actively participating in the struggle for socioeconomic and political transformation.

4.2 For Christians, however, resistance to the consumer society—a system built on false assumptions and distorted values—is not optional. The problems that global capitalism poses are not merely, nor even primarily, economic or technical, but moral and spiritual. Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda (2002:xiv) is therefore right in claiming that “the call to ‘love thy neighbor as thyself’ includes a call to subvert structures of exploitation and to forge faithful
alternatives."
At the same time, however, we need to acknowledge that the struggle to which we are
called cannot be faced on the basis of mere human strength, since “our struggle is not
against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the powers of this
dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12). As I
argued in a symposium on the Lausanne Covenant many years ago, “Behind the
materialism which characterizes the consumer society lie the powers of destruction to
Pauline) teaching on “this world” as “a system in which evil is organized in opposition to
God” and concluded:

Both technology and capital can put themselves at the service of either good or evil.
From their union, which recognizes no ethical principle, has emerged the society
which worships economic prosperity and the consequent material well-being of homo
consumers. The consumer society is the very social, political and economic situation
in which the world dominated by the powers of destruction has taken form today: the
blind faith in technology, the irreversible reverence for private property and an
inalienable right, the cult of increased production through the irresponsible sacking of
nature, the disproportional enrichment of the multinational [transnational]
corporations which further impoverishes the “disinherited of the earth,” the fever of
consumerism, ostentation, and fashion. This materialism is the ideology which is
destroying the human race (213).

If this interpretation of the nature of the struggle in which we are engaged is correct, as I
believe it is, the first requirement for the fulfillment of our call is to heed Paul’s exhortation
“to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” and “to put on the full armor of God”
consisting of the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the
shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, and prayer in the Spirit
(Eph 6:10-18). In other words, the starting point for a Christian response to the
dehumanizing form of globalization that we have briefly analyzed is to acknowledge with
utter seriousness that our life and mission is rooted in the Gospel—the good news
concerning the life and work of the our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me explain.

4.3 In the first place, a basic requirement for a proper understanding of the life and
mission of the Church in the context of the global capitalist society is a proper
understanding of the Gospel.

The central task of the Church is to communicate good news, and the good news that
Christians are called to communicate is centered in Jesus Christ, including his incarnation,
his life, his death, his resurrection, his exaltation, and his second coming. The whole
Gospel involves all of these “salvation events” and views Christ’s work not only in terms of
individual salvation—oftentimes understood as a subjective experience of forgiveness of
sins — but in terms of God’s will to bring humankind back to himself, to reconcile the
members of the human race to one another and to God’s creation, according to his original
purpose. The good news of the Kingdom is good news of holistic transformation.

When we see our own salvation in light of God’s everlasting plan, it becomes clear that we
are saved not in order to be happy, or materially successful, or free from suffering. We are
saved “to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his
sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Phil 3:10) as we seek to cooperate with God,
however modestly, in the accomplishment of his purpose in history. We are saved as
members of the Body of Christ and, as such, persons who have been called to participate in his mission to transform the world so that it will reflect God’s glory and the justice and peace of his Kingdom—the Kingdom that became a present reality in Jesus Christ.

This rootedness of our life and mission in the Gospel makes all the difference between our approach to cultural, ecological, socioeconomic and political issues and the approach of secular, humanitarian institutions to the same issues. It makes of God’s love the central motivation, of Jesus’ lifestyle the pattern, and of the power of the Holy Spirit the moving force for Christian action in society. Furthermore, it provides a sense of direction to the activities we engage in to fulfill our call. The object of our work is not to enable poor people to become full members of the consumer society. It is, rather, to help men and women—regardless of race, gender, or social class—to experience fullness of life. For the poor this implies the recovery of a sense of human dignity and the satisfaction of basic human needs. For the rich it implies the moral commitment to stewardship—“not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God” and “to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share... so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1Tim 6:17-19). For both poor and rich alike fullness of life implies putting God at the center of their lives, in such a way that, like Paul, they are able to say: “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil 4:12-13).

4.4 In the second place, a proper understanding of the Gospel involves a commitment to Christ as the Lord of the totality of life and the whole creation.

There is common agreement that the confession “Jesus Christ is the Lord” was the basic confession of the early Church, the criterion on which one’s relationship to both God and neighbor was based. This confession of Jesus Christ was made in the context of conflict with other confessions and loyalties, and this leads Paul to state:

We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one, whether on heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live (1Cor 8:4-6).

The logical consequence of the confession of Jesus Christ as the Lord is the recognition of his sovereignty over the totality of life and over the whole of creation. Christians are by definition those “who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Cor 1:2)—those who believe that the Jesus who was crucified was also risen from the dead and made Lord and King (Acts 2:36). The relation between the resurrection and the exaltation of Christ and his enthronement as Lord is clearly expressed in Ephesians 1:20-22, where Paul affirms that God’s power for the believers is the same as the one he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

Christ has become “Lord of all” (Rom 10:12)—he has been enthroned to exercise, by God’s power, the government over all creation; he has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18), and this provides the basis for the proclamation of the Gospel.
as a public message. If Jesus Christ is the Lord of the universe, the Gospel is not meant to
nurture the privatized faith of Christian religious communities that reflect the values of the
consumer society far more than what God wants of his people: “To act justly and to love
mercy and to walk humbly before ...God” (Micah 6:8). Without denying God’s concern for
personal, intimate needs, the Gospel centered in the Lord Jesus Christ is a public
message to be proclaimed today in the context of “the reigning model of economic
globalization [that] threatens Earth’s life systems, cultural integrity and diversity, and the
lives of many who are poor in order that some might consume exorbitantly and a few
accumulate vast wealth” (Moe-Lobeda 2002:1). It is God’s intent “that now, through the
church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in
the heavenly realms, according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ
Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:10). It is in light of this divine intent that the prophetic ministry of
the Church should be understood.

4.5 In the third place, discipleship as a missionary lifestyle — active participation in the
accomplishment of God’s purpose for human life and for the whole creation, as
revealed in Jesus Christ—, to which the Church and every one of her members have
been summoned, synthesizes the Church’s mission until the end of the world.

Because Jesus Christ is Lord of the whole universe, he must be proclaimed as such to all
nations that in all of them there may be disciples who confess him as “Lord of all” and live
on the basis of that confession. The sphere where he is recognized as Lord should reach
the same dimension as the sphere of the authority given him by his Father.

This aim, however, presupposes the proclamation of the whole Gospel. Without the
proclamation of Jesus as the Lord there is no full Gospel, and without the whole Gospel
there cannot be an integral mission either. This is the problem with versions of the
Christian message which restrict Jesus Christ’s action to the private life—to “spiritual
matters”—but exclude any reference to his sovereignty over other sphere of human life
and creation. If Jesus Christ is Lord of the universe, his sovereignty includes the economic
as well as the political sphere, the social as well as the cultural, the aesthetic as well as
the ecological, the personal as well as the societal. Nothing and nobody are outside the
sphere of his lordship. It follows that if Jesus Christ is Lord of all and everyone, the Church
is not an agent for “individual salvation” that puts the benefits of Christ’s work within the
reach of people, but the community called to embody the witness to his lordship over the
totality of life. Whoever hears the Gospel and responds positively, by so doing becomes a
follower of Jesus—he or she begins a transformation process that lasts throughout life and
involves every aspect of life.

From a biblical perspective, orthopraxis— the correct practice of all that Jesus taught his
disciples—is at least as important as orthodoxy, if not more, since Jesus’ aim is that his
disciples live in order to love and thus show that they are “children of the Father in

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4The accommodation of the Church to the consumer society is made visible in many churches that,
oftentimes under the influence of North American “culture Christianity”, place their emphasis on
numeral growth. Sadly, my criticism to this type of Christianity, many years ago, still holds true:
“Like traditional Roman Catholicism [in Latin America], it has accommodate itself to the world in its
eagerness to reach the majority so that there are more Christians. As a result the church, far from
being a factor for the transformation of society, becomes merely another reflection of society and
(what is worse) another instrument that society uses to condition people to materialistic values”
heaven”—“perfect as [their] Father is perfect” (Matt 5:45, 48). Jesus’ disciples will not be distinct because they are mere adherents to a religion—a “Jesus cult,” so to say—but because they follow a lifestyle that reflects the love and the justice of the Kingdom of God. The mission of the Church, therefore, cannot be restricted to “saving souls” and “planting churches”—her mission is to make disciples who learn to obey the Lord in all circumstances of daily life, in private as well as in public matters, in the spiritual as well as in the material sphere. The call of the Gospel is a call to a holistic transformation which will reflect God’s purpose to redeem his creation in all its dimensions—a transformation based on the whole Gospel centered in the Lord Jesus Christ and oriented toward the fulfillment of Jesus’ desire that his followers be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world”. Quite clearly, therefore, the mission of his disciples cannot be limited to increase the number of church members but to make disciples whose lifestyle will reproduce Jesus’ example—his unconditional love to God and neighbor, his humble service, his solidarity with the weak and the oppressed, his commitment to truth, his intolerance toward every form of hypocrisy. The mission of the Church is an invitation and a call to follow Jesus as a means to “recover” him in practical life.

The formation of disciples in the image of Christ takes place in the context of the faith community, not apart from it. Jesus said: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn 13:35). Clearly, for Jesus the mark of discipleship is love. Nevertheless, no one can learn to love in isolation from others. In fact, the knowledge—the experience—of Christ’s love, which according to Paul “surpasses knowledge,” is only possible “together with all the saints” (Eph 3:18-19). It is in the Church, “the family of God”, where disciples learn to love—and indeed not only to love but also to serve, to pray, to overcome evil, to practice good works.

4.6 In the fourth place, integral mission takes place when it is a genuine expression of life in Christ through what the Church is, acts and says as a witness to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the totality of life.

When the Church loses sight of the centrality of Jesus Christ, it ceases to be church and becomes a religious sect, unable to relate her message to practical life, on both a personal and a societal level. A holistic church is one that understands that all spheres of life are “missionary fields” and is constantly seeking for ways to affirm the sovereignty of Christ over all of them. If Jesus Christ is Lord of all, the Church is truly Church of Christ in the extent to which she understands herself as “the community of the King” and defines her purpose in terms of witnessing to him, to the glory of God, through what she does, and what she says. By taking these three dimension into account—being, doing, and saying—, the Church's mission is defined "incarnationally."

If the Gospel of reconciliation through Jesus Christ is to be incarnated in the Christian community, there is no way to avoid the question posed by the division of society, on both a local and a global level, along social, cultural, economic, racial, political, or class lines. The Church is called to be, both locally and globally, the community of reconciliation fully committed to unity and mutual acceptance in the midst of diversity, fragmentation, discrimination, exclusion, and social apartheid. Consequently, the first prerequisite for mission at the turn of the century is the formation of churches that embody the Gospel of reconciliation.

The local Church whose constituency is a visible illustration of God's reconciling purpose in Jesus Christ is in a unique position to take the initiative in promoting the kind of open
dialogue which is needed in order to enable civil society in a globalized world to find ways to participate in the solution of social and ecological problems. As Toffler has pointed out, much of the planning which is done today in the hope of solving these problems is "long-range", obsessed with economics, and elitist, far removed from the ordinary citizen. Therefore, it lacks the "vital negative feedback [which] can only come from an educated, informed, and involved public" (1975:100). If society is to move away from that kind of centralized planning, conditioned by big business corporations, however, the decision-making process has to be democratized, "not merely because that is good, just, or altruistic, but because it is necessary [since] without broad-scale citizen involvement, even the most conscientious and expertly drawn plans are likely to blow up in our faces" (101). For the necessary change, "new ways will have to be found to open the entire process, even at the highest levels, to popular input, to feedback from below" (ibid.) No institution in society is better fit to foster such a "feedback from below" for the good of all members of society than the heterogeneous church—the community that sees the whole of creation under the lordship of Jesus Christ and has a strong sense of unity in him across all kinds of barriers.

Furthermore, if we Christians have been “saved to serve — “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10)—, there is no place for the sharp division we oftentimes make between faith and works, between the personal gospel and the social gospel, between evangelism and social responsibility. In a world deeply affected by poverty, exploitation, institutional violence, and injustice, the church is called to embody God's love and justice. West's poignant question, addressed to fellow-Christians in the United States but equally relevant to anyone in a position of privilege anywhere in the world, is unavoidable:

* Will we keep our eye on the real issue: the use of our great economic and technological resources, or our vast financial system, to promote the welfare of all the people, not the profit of a few, to bring the poor and the dispossessed into full community with the rest of us—in short, to realize justice in the world? (2000:6).

For the community of "those who hunger and thirst for justice", every effort “to realize justice” in the world in Christ's name falls under the category of "doing the witness" to the incarnate Son of God— the God who "loves justice" (Ps 99:4). Over against the globalization of neo-liberal capitalism, based on selfishness and oriented to self-gratification, we are called to globalize solidarity with the victims of globalization, and to globalize it as an expression of the life that we have been given in Jesus Christ, who was anointed by the Spirit of the Lord “to preach good news to the poor... to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Lk 4:18-19).

At the same time, in the context of being and doing the witness, we have the privilege and responsibility to share with others the word of the Gospel. All too often in evangelical circles the saying of the witness has been isolated from the totality of the witness. In reaction, many Christians fail to see the crucial importance of sharing the Good News orally. Yet people need the bread for physical life but also the Bread of life. Telling "the old, old story of Jesus and his love" and calling men and women not to conform any longer to "the patterns of this world" (Rom 12:2) but to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ over the totality of life is an integral part of our witness.

Being the witness, doing the witness, and saying the witness are the essential ingredients
of the Church’s mission in the face of globalization. This is the order of the day for the Church of Jesus Christ in the "global village" at the beginning of the twentieth first century.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


